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THE
"SLING AND THE STONE."

VOL. III.

FOR THE YEAR 1868.

110800

BY

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00110800

LONDON:
TRÜBNER AND CO., 60, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1868.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY WERTHEIMER, LEA AND CO.
CIRCUS PLACE, FINSBURY CIRCUIS.

PREFACE TO VOL. III.

“THE SLING AND THE STONE” is, and is meant to be, a challenge. Spectators, however, may quite fail to see what the challenge is, and to whom it is given. It would be, for instance, a great mistake to suppose that the author is giving a challenge to the ecclesiastical law, or that he is seeing how far he may try the endurance of polemical orthodoxy. Such contests are unworthy of one who feels the deep solemnity of the questions he has raised. The author of these Volumes is not at all overwhelmed by the fear of what course any Church or Section of Christendom may take with regard to himself or any other individual teacher. He cannot bring himself to identify the cause of truth with the attitude of any particular organization of men towards it, nor can he be so vain or foolish as to suppose that his own individual fate, whether prosperous or adverse, will have any permanent connection with the solution of the questions which he has submitted to public examination.

If the old folly of persecuting opinions be successfully repeated in his own case, the author knows quite well that it will not drown the voice which has already been heard, nor stifle one single enquiry to which his hearers and readers have been stimulated.

The challenge herein given is not, then, one relating to position in the Church of England, nor is it addressed to Archbishops, and Bishops, and Ecclesiastical Courts any more than to the whole laity of Christendom.

But to every man calling himself a Christian, who may read these Sermons, they convey a challenge, the spirit of which may be thus briefly expressed—Are these things so? Is this true or false? An answer is demanded from every reader, not by the humble writer, but by the paramount importance of the questions themselves to these simple but momentous enquiries:—

Is it true that the human race was ever under the curse of God?

Is it true that God needs the intervention of another to mediate with men, and to bring them into a state in which He will be more favourable towards them than He is already?

Is it true that there is any God but He who made us.

Is it true that God ever was, or ever is, at a distance from this world, so that in any sense it can be true that He comes and goes to and from the earth, or sends some one to act as envoy on His behalf?

Is it true that the only or even the chief signs of God's presence and power are to be found in what is called "miracle"?

Is it true that such miracles would prove God's *constant* presence and favour, or only His *occasional* presence and favour?

Is it true that the doctrine of vicarious punishment is of any moral benefit to mankind, or at all redounding to the honour of God?

Is it true that men are to be saved or lost according to their religious belief?

Are we, or are we not, to look for answers to these questions among the Archives of the Church, and to be satisfied, as our highest duty, with the answers to be found there?

Are we, or are we not, bound to believe all that the Bible says on these and similar questions?

Let us consider on what grounds we should be compelled to accept any statement or opinion merely on the word of an apostle or an evangelist. At present the sole ground offered to us is traditional

authority. In plain language, we are required to accept every apostolic dictum as true because the Church believes that the apostles were infallible. Opponents are only shocked, they will not even condescend to argument, when an apostolic statement is challenged; and at present the only semblance of a reason given for this absurd reverence is that the Church has always held apostolic authority to be absolute.

But we are only arguing in a vicious circle, if we believe all that the Apostles said, because the Church which was founded upon them says we ought. Where shall we obtain an external authority on which to base anything like a logical structure?

The Church is a living fact—no doubt—and her assumption of being founded by Jesus Christ and the Apostles may be readily granted. But waiving the no less patent fact of her fluctuation of doctrine and manifest departure from the recorded teaching of Jesus, the question will be asked, On what does the authority of Jesus Himself rest? Are we to accept it as a matter of pure faith, or are there evidences for it independent of the Church and New Testament, which are both believed to depend entirely on the authority of Jesus?

These are matters of fundamental importance, and cannot be ignored by any one who attempts to grapple with the scepticism of the age.

If we are to stand on pure faith, without evidence, let it be at once confessed; but it is only a waste of time and words to follow up such a confession by a parade of elaborate arguments. If the right to demand evidence be admitted, let all the evidence that is legitimate and trustworthy be at once produced. Those who are earnestly seeking rational grounds for accepting the authority of Jesus and His Apostles will not however be easily satisfied with Bible arguments. It is enough for them to have shown that there exist defects and errors in it both moral and historical, theological as well as cosmological; that even Apostles were mistaken, and that the records of the noblest life are not without blemish.

The readers of these Sermons will discover without difficulty what is positive in their teaching without the necessity for recapitulation. They will find more agreement with Scripture and with the teachings of the Great Master than might have been expected, considering what was said against the *Sling and the Stone* in Convocation. But whatever the author has said stands on its own merits, deriving no fictitious

value from conformity with more ancient and consecrated opinions, nor weakened at all by divergence from them.

Conscious of some errors, the author commends his work, in all modesty, to the Christian peoples, neither fearing ridicule, nor deprecating just censure, but simply assured that what is erroneous in it will soon be forgotten, and that what is true in it can never be overthrown.

HEALAUGH VICARAGE,
December 1st, 1868.

THE
"SLING AND THE STONE."

VOL. III.

PART I.—JANUARY, 1868.

THE PATH OF SAFETY,

AND

HUMAN PREDICTION.

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

EVENING, 17TH NOVEMBER, 1867.

“ Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths.”

PROVERBS iii. 5, 6.

SUITABLE as this sacred counsel is for all men in every possible condition of life, it is especially needed by those whose duty and function is the teaching of others. Still more needful it is for those few who strike out a new path for themselves, and endeavour to press their own earnest convictions upon the men of their time, in the face of great opposition, and in open antagonism to what is commonly believed.

When a new teacher thus finds himself called by

an inward voice, whose commands cannot be silenced, to utter thoughts which to himself are intensely true, but which to others appear wild and erroneous, he is thrown back again and again, to question his own heart and to satisfy himself that he is doing right in the sight of God. The very misgivings which arise through the comparative solitude of his position can only be quelled by a repeated casting of himself on the guidance of his God, while angry denunciations from opponents, joined to the earnest entreaties of affectionate friends, tend to deepen his self-distrust, and to drive him more and more to "trust in the Lord with all his heart and lean not unto his own understanding." He knows that he cannot be infallible; he is sure that there must be some weak point in his thoughts and teaching; he feels certain that even the truth he may utter will be marred and defaced by his own clumsiness, or by a too great eagerness in the statement of it; and all this tends still more to weaken his confidence in his own rightness, and to strengthen his trust in the living God, who alone can lead him, and that only after long delays, into all the Truth.

Hence it is that such a teacher will be foremost in pressing the counsel of my text upon his hearers. If he himself may err through too great a reliance on his own understanding, his hearers may err still more if they lean too much on him. If he finds that all his own strength comes through "trusting in the Lord with all his heart," he will lead his hearers to

do so too; not to accept his teaching blindly and without examination, but to seek, as he has done, to be taught only by the Lord. The more he insists on the right and duty of private judgment in matters of religion, the more anxiously does he implore his hearers to seek the truth from God Himself, to cast themselves entirely on His guidance and to lean on no human guide whatever.

I am led into these observations by the recollection that as a congregation you are very singularly placed. Not many congregations in the whole world are being spoken to from week to week as I have felt it my duty to speak to you. And on all sides I am being asked whether my parishioners go with me and sympathise with my views. To this question, as you know, I can always give a most favourable reply—better than many would have expected, considering how plainly and repeatedly I have gone against the tide of popular religious opinion. It is true there are still some who cannot see the truth or reasonableness of what I say, and who still retain their belief in opinions which I have tried to remove. But of these few, who are not more than ten (if so many) in the whole parish, only three or four habitually absent themselves from church, while the rest, knowing themselves to be opposed to my teaching, continue to come and join in our worship, and are generous enough to listen without prejudice, and to gather up something from my teaching which may do them good. I am grateful to these friends for their candour and goodwill, and

should be deeply miserable, if by any extreme shock to their religious sentiments I should drive them away altogether; but I think they will agree with me when I say that I have always tried to get my hearers to think for themselves, that I have never insisted on my own views in such a way as to deny to others the right of free enquiry and free opinion, and that this liberty which I have both given and exercised, has been a tie between me and them which still enables me to preach what I believe to be true, and enables them to listen to what I have to say, without angry feeling or personal annoyance.

To one and all my earnest counsel has been and will, I hope, ever be, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own [or to my] understanding." Take nothing for granted which I may teach; trust God to give you wisdom infinitely more precious than any wisdom which I can give, or which you can get out of your own brains. If you *agree* with me, submit your judgment in prayer to God. If you *differ* from me, pray likewise that God may teach both me and yourselves.

The worst and greatest hindrance to our trusting in God is to be found in the fact that so many men, all equally convinced that they are trusting in God, arrive at opposite conclusions. And indeed this is a stumbling block which at first sight seems not easy to remove.

The celebrated Dr. John Henry Newman, while his mind was wavering between the Church of England,

in which he had been born and reared, and the Church of Rome, whose priesthood he now adorns, wrote the following hymn, which to my mind expresses with great beauty and sweetness that feeling of entire trust in God, which it is my desire to cherish, and to implant in your breasts:—

“Lead, kindly light, amid th’ encircling gloom,
 Lead Thou me on;
 The night is dark, and I am far from home;
 Lead Thou me on;
 Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
 The distant scene; one step enough for me.

“I was not ever thus, nor pray’d, that Thou
 Should’st lead me on;
 I loved to choose and see my path; but now
 Lead Thou me on!
 I loved the garish day, and spite of fears,
 Pride ruled my will. Remember not past years!

“So long Thy Power has blest me, sure it still
 Will lead me on
 O’er moor and fen, o’er crag and torrent, till
 The night is gone,
 And with the morn those angel faces smile
 Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile!”

And yet, what immediate answer came to that prayer? He became a Romanist, which, in the eyes of many pious Protestants, seemed as though God had forsaken him, and had left him to guide himself, or had left him to the blind guidance of fellow-men. I am a Protestant, as you well know, but yet I do not think so. There may be a mystery in it which we

cannot fathom, but I believe Newman was really led by God to see a truth which he had not seen, and to do a work for God in that Church which we Protestants are accustomed to condemn. Besides all this, neither is our end come, nor Newman's. Newman only asked to be led, and God's road is often a long one. He at least acknowledged God in his ways, and God is surely leading him, though not in the paths we wish to tread. The journey from darkness to light is but begun for him, and for all of us; and there are, doubtless, numberless tracks which God's pilgrims have to pursue, though each may think his own the brightest and shortest. I, too, with not less earnestness than yourselves or Newman, have prayed to be led. We can do no more; we can but feel that we cannot guide ourselves, and we look piteously up for a hand to take hold of us in the gloom; and having done this, we rest in the pity and tenderness of One who is at least as pitiful and tender as ourselves, and we may be very sure that in His faithfulness He will lead us at length into all truth, and guide our feet into the way of peace. If God has more than one path for His children to walk in before their souls can reach the glorious light in which He dwells, surely it should be no obstacle to our entire trust in Him, to find others, no less earnest than ourselves, divided in opinion, and walking in paths which we fancy are leading them only astray. For what is it after all which brings us to God and truth? Surely not religious opinions, but religious

earnestness, religious hearts, self-distrust, faith in God, and trying to be good up to the light we have. This is the true path to our heavenly home, in which men of every creed and opinion may walk if they choose.

My war with some religious opinion is, perhaps, greater than such conflict ever was before, but remember *why* I fight. I fight against it only because it is put in the place of this simple trust in God; because reliance on the authority of churches and books, in my opinion, tends not to inspire trust in the Lord, but to root it out—to stifle what little true faith was once there. I war not with one set of dogmas that I may set up another on the same basis of authority, but I am at war with the whole principle of substituting doctrines for a personal trust in the living God. Priestcraft or human authority over the souls of men has had a long and triumphant career in the world, its progress marked, alas! by the anguish and slaughtered hopes and martyred lives of the world's best and bravest men—by deeds which are at variance with the first principle of trusting in God to guide us all. If I not only believed myself to be right, but believed that no one else was right unless he agreed with me,—if I believed that those who hold another creed than mine would go to hell,—I should begin with pride and vain-glory, and end with hatred and persecution, malice and all uncharitableness. But if I believe myself to be right only so far as I am in earnest and true-hearted, I begin with humility and self-distrust, thinking other men

are being also led by God, though they do not agree with me, and I end with toleration and love. And it is my warmest desire that, as minister and people, you and I may be evermore bound in ties of affection and mutual respect, helping one another whereinsoever we can, and whenever we differ in opinion, to give each other, as we are bound, the fullest credit for sincerity, and a desire to be guided by God. I am quite sure that if such a principle as this were to supersede the prevailing principle of dogmatism, we should hear no more of different churches and sects, except for the purpose of establishing different modes of worship to suit the widely-differing tastes of different men. Instead of uniformity, there would be *unity*. One spirit pervading all, and one sentiment of brotherly love springing out of the deepest and strongest fact of our being—that we are all the children of God.

But not only does this inspired counsel hold good in religious matters, but in every possible condition of life. With all our practical wisdom, of which we are, as a nation, very proud, we make continually the most dreadful blunders. We find our shrewdest calculations break down now and then when we thought we had guarded against every possible mischance. The lack of wisdom is sure to be felt sooner or later by those who are wishing to go right. We take, perhaps, only one step in the wrong path, leaning to our own understanding, and we find in bitterness and sorrow how hard it is to get back again

into the right one. We have been acknowledging only ourselves and our own will in the deliberations we have made about life and duty, and have left Him altogether out of the account who should have been first and foremost of all our counsellors. We have forgotten Him "from whom all good counsels proceed." And so our lives are too often made up of blind guesses and fatal blunders, and we come at last to think that good and ill luck is all the god we have left to guide and befriend us.

But God is, indeed, more kind to us than we deserve. If He exercise no special providence to rescue the fool from his folly, or to turn the righteous penalty of self-will into the reward of obedience, yet He cries after the poor wanderers, as if all their worst transgressions were but errors, "Turn, oh turn unto me! why will ye die?" And when the lost sheep is far away in the wilderness, its feet clogged fast in some dreadful mire, or bound immoveably in some tangled brake, the good shepherd, still faithful in his love and care, will go after that which was lost *until he find it*, and will bring it home rejoicing.

Such a hope, dear friends, is for you and for me, and for all of us who have gone astray. We need not then despair for ourselves, nor despair for others. We need not be puffed up with our own little knowledge, nor be angry at the obstinate opposition of other men. We are all wrong somewhere, and only God can set us right; we are all of us right only so far as we admit our ignorance and error when we see it, and are "trusting in the Lord with all our heart."

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 3RD NOVEMBER, 1867.

“ And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh ; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions : and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.”

JOEL ii. 28, 29.

It has happened in all ages of the world that the noblest aspirations of the world's best men have only been poor and partial when compared with the actual course of events. Their predictions were right in the main, but in detail they broke down. The life and spirit of them were preserved, but the form in

which they were developed was very far different to the expectation.

When good men, after meditating on the wants of mankind, give utterance to their hopes in God, and describe in language the blessings of the good time coming, they are right only so far as they foretell fresh light and greater blessings for mankind at large, but they are generally quite wrong in defining what that light will be, and in what shape God's blessings will be sent. It is not want of truthfulness on their part, but simply want of capacity to judge of what will best suit the ages that are to come after them. It is not want of spiritual insight into the tenderness and goodness and forethought of God, but it is want of experimental knowledge which is peculiar to each age in succession, and which cannot be accurately foretold. We know what we want to-day, but we cannot with any certainty predict what will be the wants of the next generation.

We are certainly right in predicting an increase of knowledge and of goodwill amongst men, but we cannot possibly foretell in what direction that future knowledge may lead posterity, nor in what shape human fellowship may clothe itself. So when Jesus Himself promised that the Holy Spirit should guide His disciples into all truth, and be with the Church in all ages, He was unable to give even the faintest outline of the Church's history, or to foregather all the difficulties, trials, conflicts, through which the simple truth would have to force its way to victory.

To come down to later times, the great Reformers of the sixteenth century might well look forward with prophetic eye to the glories of the Church in her freedom, but not one of them could have anticipated or even dreamed of the ultimate consequences of their noble struggles against ecclesiastical tyranny. They did not for a moment dream that their own overthrow of a corrupted authority would lead in three centuries to a rebellion against all external authority in matters of faith.

So, too, Wesley, in his manly efforts to revive a dying or slumbering Church, never anticipated such a revival of religious feeling as is now really due to his unselfish exertions. For, with all its faults, Wesleyanism is at least the second great religious power both in England and America. Not twenty years ago, a society was formed among Christians of the Evangelical School for the practice of simultaneous private prayer once a week for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This society, though small, was joined by hundreds of the most earnest and godly people in our land; but I well remember one of its members saying to me, "If God answers our prayers and pours out more abundantly of His Spirit, those who prayed for it will be disappointed when it comes, for the Spirit's teaching and manifestation will be very different to what they expect. If the Spirit teaches us anything new, we shall not like to learn it." This remarkable prediction was actually verified, and only few out of all those earnest

petitioners welcomed the new light when it came. God heard their prayers indeed, but the answer did not please them—it was not what they expected. In the remarkable passage which I have read as my text, the prophet Joel is manifestly right in predicting the full outpouring of God's spirit upon all flesh. But it took place in a very different way to what he imagined. His trust in God's overflowing regard for all sorts and conditions of men was certain and well-grounded, but his conception of the way in which that Divine regard would show itself was entirely faulty. In his days, the tokens of a Divine spirit were looked for in prophecies and dreams and visions; the "inspired" man was not the man merely gifted with common sense and human kindness, but he who uttered strange and scarcely intelligible predictions, or declaimed loudly against the vices and follies of his people. Inspiration of God was only recognised not when men learnt by it to do their common duty well and to be full of kindness, honesty, and truth, but when it made men eccentric, censorious, and visionary. So, many and many a man who would now be thought half-witted, was in those days looked upon as half-divine, and his incoherent utterances were received with awe and superstitious wonder. It was a saying among the early Greeks that the gods filled the breasts of the frenzied. Such a feeling as this, founded as it was upon entire ignorance of the beauty of wisdom, and upon a deep misconception of the nature of God's influence

on man, could not fail to colour the thoughts and tinge the brightest aspirations of the holy men of old. And so we find Joel, even in the moment of highest spiritual elevation, when his faith in the universal love of God was strongest, and his hopes for the world at large most exalted, still cleaving to the poorer ideas of inspiration in which he had been trained. He still expected that God's Spirit could only act upon the human heart in the way of inspiring prophetic utterances, or filling the sleeper's brain with dreams, or the waking dreamer with impracticable fancies. We now know that God's good Spirit stirs the hearts of all flesh, but in a very different way. He teaches us truth, and impels us to duty. He leads men to search out knowledge, and to put it to a holy use when they have found it. He inspires fathers and mothers with wisdom, as well as with love, that they may not wreck their children's souls by weak indulgence or by cruel tyranny. He leads the teachers and schoolmasters of the age to discover what is true, what is best worth teaching, that the new generation may inherit the wealth which their forefathers have gathered by suffering. He gives wisdom and honesty to kings and governments, that they may preserve order and administer justice. The doctors and surgeons He inspires with power of observation and skill, by which the art of healing may be in time perfected. The very clergy who lean too much on the inspiration of books, and councils, and bishops,

He makes wise by the light of science and criticism, if haply they will only walk by that light instead of by the feeble glimmer of tradition and antiquity. The aged are led on by Him to encourage and not to obstruct the progress of thought and the improvement of society, while the young are taught to learn by the experience of their elders, and to cultivate veneration and respect for those who have trained, and who still bear rule over them.

In agriculture, commerce, navigation, manufacture, we see the workings of that Universal Spirit, in spite of all human obstinacy, prejudice, and selfishness, enlightening our ignorance, strengthening our weakness, and rewarding our perseverance. And over the hearts of all sorts and conditions of men the Spirit of God still moves with inconceivable patience and constancy. None are naturally so loving and pure but what they need the Divine flame to warm and purify them still more. None are naturally so cold and corrupt but that the Heavenly Fire is still burning in them—smouldering as a spark—which no frost of the affections, no torrent of passion, can ever extinguish. The best of men owe all their nobleness, and the worst of men their one redeeming virtue, to this Blessed Spirit.

But if we have this assurance that every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Light, what manner of men ought we to be, as contrasted with those who thought that God's good Spirit only taught men to rave and to dream? What manner of masters and mistresses,

of husbands and wives, of parents and children, of relations and friends, of servants and handmaids, ought we to be on whom this Spirit has been poured out? We know that He helps us to do our duty, inspires us to be true and honest, faithful and kind in all our relations with each other; how then is it that we fail in so many of our duties, care so little for truth, put self-interest for integrity, and self-indulgence for love? It is chiefly because we do not try to walk by the Spirit, and we weaken little by little the hold which the Divine Spirit once had over the wills and affections of our flesh. To be our own masters, our own keepers, to make everything and everybody else in the world useful to ourselves—this is the main object of too many of our lives, although we are quite ashamed to own it when put before us in this plain way. The Spirit wants us to be everybody's servants, to be keepers and guardians of others, to make ourselves useful to everybody and to every good cause that comes in our way; and this is repugnant to our natural taste—frightfully difficult, too, in every age of our lives. To prophesy a brilliant career of earthly fortune for our own selves, to dream dreams of ambition, to build castles in the air of what we hope to be, to do, and to enjoy, and to see visions of nothing but the gratification of our own desires—these are no tokens of Divine Inspiration. They are simply the tokens of our own fleshly mind which cannot even understand the happiness of the Divine life—much less be brought to submit willingly to its rules of self-denial and self-sacrifice.

The voice of the Lord in our hearts is too plain for us ever to mistake any other voice for it. It is the call of love, entreating, commanding us to do as we would be done by—to try by every possible means so to improve and cultivate our characters and faculties that we may be a blessing and a comfort to every one with whom we have to do.

We think much progress has been made already. And we are right. But who can tell how much lies yet before us, equally within the scope of human attainment? Let us go forward, and in the spirit of the apostle, let each one of us say in his heart, “I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I will do—I will keep my body under and bring it into subjection, and press forward towards the mark of my high calling.”—“I will walk circumspectly, not as a fool, but as wise, redeeming the time.”

THE
"SLING AND THE STONE."

VOL. III.

PART II.—FEBRUARY, 1868.

THE UNBEARABLE YOKE,
AND
THE PROPER FUNCTION OF CLERGY.

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 15TH DECEMBER, 1867.

*“Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon
the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers
nor we were able to bear.”*

ACTS xv. 10.

WE cannot close our eyes to the fact that a struggle has commenced between the priestly power and the human mind, which may prove both fierce and deadly, and which must, in any case, for a long time disturb the peace of the Church and the world at large.

In this great struggle we are all equally interested, men, women, clergy, and children alike. All our future depends on the issue; and therefore I consider it part of our duty to learn as much about it as

possible, and to watch keenly the chances of the strife, that we may be ready, one and all, to take our share in it when the necessity for action becomes manifest.

To give but one out of many good reasons for making this matter a subject of serious meditation in this place, I will only mention the fact that our newspapers teem with paragraphs about "Ritualism," and thus bring part of the conflict into almost every home; but the newspapers, being mostly written in the interests of certain parties, cannot be expected to give a clear and impartial account of the true object of the struggle. The mere details of the warfare they report well enough, but nine readers out of ten are left uninformed as to the real cause of the war and the true object for which the war has been waged.

To the best of my ability, I will set before you the real nature of this struggle. I will tell you what each side is aiming at. I will endeavour candidly to unfold also their motives.

First, what is "Ritualism?" Ritualism is a new fashion in conducting public worship, or rather an old fashion revived. The Church of England was once, as you all know, part and parcel of the Roman Catholic Church, having Romish priests and monks for its clergy, Romish doctrines, and Romish forms of worship, services in Latin, an unknown tongue. The Reformation came and swept all, or nearly all, of that away, giving us in their place a married clergy, the thirty-nine Articles, and the Book of Common Prayer in English, which we now use. The services

were so altered as to be in themselves a protest against the old Romish Ritual, the articles were framed so as to be a protest against the old Romish doctrines, and the clergy generally protested against the Romish practices of private confession and absolution. Hence our Church was called the Protestant, or Protesting Church, and other Churches in Europe which had made the same protests against Rome were called Protestant too.

Now, however, there is what is called a re-action in favour of the old forms of worship, towards some of the doctrines of Rome, and towards certain practices of the Romish priesthood. This revival was begun at least five-and-thirty years ago, but it is only within the last few years that it has come forward with so bold a front. The real origin of the movement I shall speak of presently, but the immediate consequences of its later development may be traced in some measure to the love of music and art which has grown rapidly in England within the last twenty years—to the absolute weariness felt by the young people in listening to the dull services of a Puritan Church, and to the still more uninteresting and gloomy sermons of the Puritan preacher. They were tired out with the long service in which they could not heartily join, and then the long sermon turned their weariness into disgust, and they thankfully caught at any opportunity of passing the Sunday morning in a more agreeable and exciting manner. They soon found how much nicer it was to have plenty of fine music and gorgeous

banners, and priests walking in procession and changing their vestments, waving incense and perpetually kneeling and bowing in silence before some highly decorated altar, than to sit in the old high pews without the smallest change or incident beyond a Hymn or Psalm in the whole service to arouse their attention, or to relieve the dull monotony of the clergyman's voice.

This was how the Ritualists found numbers of young Church-goers, chiefly women and some young men, who felt it was due to society to be seen at a place of worship. They accepted the bait only too readily, and whatever else may happen, I do not think this part of Ritualism, in this sense, will ever be put down. I believe that the mere pleasure of it as a spectacle will make it strike its roots too deeply to be easily torn up. Of course tastes vary, and what pleases some is deeply offensive to others; but it must be owned that the repugnance expressed for some Ritualistic practices is ridiculous and extravagant. I can, however, heartily sympathise with those who love to hear grand and beautiful music, played on the finest instruments, or sung by well-trained choirs. I can sympathise with the taste for lovely colours, banners, and decorations, and with the sweet fragrance of flowers and of incense; and am not incapable of enjoying the solemn procession of clergy and choirs as they chant their Hymns of Praise. But then I speak of all this as pleasant and entertaining. I do not speak of it as helping my devotion,

because *my* ideas of devotion and worship have little to do with what goes on in our Churches and Chapels. I think the most exquisite moments of rapturous worship are enjoyed elsewhere, and then in stillness and solitude; the excitement produced on the senses by music and colour being far inferior to the unutterable emotion of a worshipping heart. Yet there is no reason why the sensational and the spiritual emotions should be separated.

However, to get back to the Ritualism of the day. This I believe to be the secret of its present success, and the so-called Ritualistic clergy have so far got a hold in the country that they can get large congregations and plenty of money to buy robes and banners.

From the noise hitherto made about it in the papers and in Parliament, you might think that the struggle was only about this trifling matter of the conduct of public worship. Many persons imagine that because it is all new, unusual, and very likely illegal, that a great outcry and a little legislation will soon put it all down, and restore the old fashioned services which contented us for 200 years. No doubt Parliament is omnipotent, and could, if it would, make all Ritualistic worship illegal. But I do not think it will, because many members of Parliament would be sorry for the change, and many more would rather leave such matters alone, and allow them to be settled by individual ministers and their congregations. But I am sure of this, that if Ritualism were put down to-morrow, the great struggle, of which I

spoke at the beginning of my sermon, would have to be fought out all the same. For Ritualism is merely a badge, not compulsory, but taken up by a good many—certainly not by all—of that body of clergy who wish to restore the Divine authority of a priesthood. All the known Ritualists are bent on being priests; but there are indeed many more bent on being priests who are not Ritualists. And this brings me to my next point. What are they aiming at who took the first step in this development of Ritualism?

They are, I believe, aiming to restore the Divine authority of the clergy as priests over the minds and souls of men. This authority was ever claimed by the Church of Rome, then repudiated at the Reformation, and now is again claimed by a section of the Anglican Church in her own name, and not as dependent in any way on Rome. They can afford to treat Rome with haughty independence now, for age has given them prestige in England, and so in the name of their own Anglican Church they demand the same submission from the laity of the Church of England as the Church of Rome demanded before the Reformation.

Their *real* desire is to make you all submit to their doctrine, their teaching and their rules; so that no other authority on earth, not even that of fathers and mothers, or husbands, or magistrates, or kings, shall be higher than their own. They wish to rule

absolutely, to control not only the lives and deeds, but the very words and thoughts of mankind.

I do not for a moment attribute to them, as a class, any low or unworthy motive in seeking to hold this power over their fellow-men. They may, like most of us, love power and influence, but I do not think that this is what impels most of them to advocate a system which strikes at the root of human liberty. I believe that they think our very safety depends on our entire submission to them, that they seek to rule and bind us for *our* sakes, that we may be brought, as they think, to God and heaven and peace, and be saved from eternal ruin. They are (most falsely, as it seems to me) convinced that we are all by nature in danger of endless suffering, and that, unless we obey *them* in thought, word and deed, unless *they* pray and sacrifice for us, and *they* pardon our offences, there is no hope for us beyond the grave.

We do not, then, wish to be ungrateful in declining their interference and in rejecting their control. We simply say to them, "You have made a fatal error at the very outset of your principles. You have made an entirely false assumption at the very beginning, and therefore no wonder that your course is altogether a foolish and mistaken one. You say we are by nature separated from God, or under His wrath—that He will not hear our prayers or forgive our sins until we have been baptised, and have submitted ourselves to your authority. We deny this entirely. We say that we are *not* separated from God, nor under His

wrath; that God is always with us all, and we are His children by nature, and therefore we are near and dear to Him all our lives through. With or without your help we need no redemption in the sense in which *you* offer it to us. You are telling us we have got no friend here while outside your temple; but we know that we are not alone, because our Father is with us, and you can offer no friend, no saviour, no comforter, so good and true and faithful as He. We are therefore not afraid to disobey your injunctions, to tear up your creeds, and to despise your ordinances. For all these are based upon a fundamental mistake. Prove to us that apart from the Church and your help and your guidance we have no God, and then we may gladly take refuge under the shelter which you offer. When we cease to believe in the Fatherly love of God for us, then it will be time enough to betake ourselves to the refuge which you have built, and to the salvation which you dispense."

The coming struggle, then, my friends, is not between one form of worship and another; *that* may belong to it, but it is only a small part of it; but it is between the claim, on the one hand, of a Divine authority over our minds and souls by fellow-men on the ground of their ordination in a particular Church to the office of priesthood. And on the other hand, there is the love of freedom to think for ourselves in matters of religion, and our innate conviction that we are not by nature hateful to our Maker. We claim the fatherly love of God for us all, not because

we are good, for we know we are evil, but because *He* is good. And we claim the right of using our own reason, our own common sense, in matters of religion just as much as in every other department of human life. The priest, on the other hand, denies God's fatherly love for us, and makes whatever love He ascribes to God to be conditional, covenanted, agreed upon, or even bargained and paid for. He denies too our right to use our reason at all on religious matters, and says, virtually, "You have no right to think for yourselves; the Church alone must think for you, and you must submit your reason and will to the priest in every particular."

I ask of you, is not this "to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" Is not this a tyranny which we should feel most galling in our homes and families, haunting us from the cradle to the grave with its threats and thongs? Can we bear to give up ourselves, our wives, and our children to the dominion of a man like ourselves who has just happened to pass through the ceremony of ordination by a bishop? Is this weakness consistent with our manly and strong English character? I think not, and therefore, though I know the struggle will be long and deadly, our English love of liberty and our Northern trust in God's love for us all will surely gain the victory.

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 22ND DECEMBER, 1867.

“ O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! ”

ISAIAH xl. 9.

OUR attention was engaged last Sunday in considering the struggle between the priestly power and the human mind. I endeavoured then to show what were the claims for Divine authority which are being made by a certain portion of the Anglican clergy, and what were the motives which induced them to make this struggle for absolute supremacy. I trusted

and still trust in the manliness of Englishmen to reject this authority, as being "a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear."

The question, however, may arise, If the clergy are not to be priests in the sense of mediating between us and God, and of controlling absolutely the thoughts, words, and deeds of their fellow men, what is their proper function? If you deprive them of their priesthood, what office do you assign them in its place? This question I will endeavour to answer this morning, though I am under great misgivings whether it can be answered at all efficiently in a single discourse. The text which I have read to you I will now repeat, adopting in the place of the first phrases the marginal readings which are given in our Bibles, and which render it far more intelligible.

"O thou, that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain; O thou, that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!"

We have in these words, I think, the answer to the question, "What function are we to assign to our clergy?" The prophet, speaking either to Zion as the seat of the Jewish Hierarchy, or to Jerusalem as the centre and capital of God's peculiar people, to the prophet who is sent to the Levitical order of priests, or to the prophet who lifts up his voice in the streets of Jerusalem, gives them the word which they

must utter forth in God's name to all the people far and near, to all the cities of Judah. -

The injunction "Get thee up into the high mountain" is obviously a figure of speech, signifying the efforts which ought to be made in order to take in a wider range, and be both well seen and well heard. And this points out the duty of making known in the most prominent and public manner the message which God's servants have to deliver. They are not to whisper it in secret to a select few; they are not to utter it in such terms as only the learned and initiated can understand. But they are to publish it abroad in the most simple, clear and intelligible manner, free from all mystery or mystification, that all alike may know what it means. The isolated prophet himself, no less than the Church as a corporate body, is commanded "Lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid." What he has to utter must be heard far and near; it must be spoken by a voice loud and strong, showing the earnestness of the speaker's own conviction and the eagerness with which he wishes to deliver what he believes to be God's message to men. He must speak too with courage, knowing the danger of his work, and yet manfully rising above it, never shrinking through any fear from openly declaring the good tidings.

Before the message can be duly delivered, there must be first a duly qualified messenger. He must be earnest, honest and brave. Without earnestness his voice will be weak, and few will hear him. With-

out honesty, he will tamper with the message, and so leave a false impression on his hearers of the will of Him that sent him; and without courage, he will either remain silent and keep God's word from being heard at all, or he will become dishonest and falsify the message, in order to please either his hearers or his fellow-messengers.

And now, what is he to say? What is God's message through him to the cities of Judah? Say unto them, "Behold your God!" That was what God knew that men wanted most, that was what God wanted men to hear. It was no message about Him from a distant world. It was no promise that He would visit some of them some day when they were ready to hear Him. It was no invitation to Temple or Synagogue to meet Him where He would be specially present. It was about no envoy or representative to whom He had delegated the charge of meeting, guiding and comforting his absent subjects. But it was simply "Behold your God." Lift up thine eyes and see Him. He is a God at hand, and not afar off. He is here now, in all time and in all place, the same; God bids you only open your eyes and you cannot miss seeing Him. God knew men wanted to get near to Himself. He was nearer and closer to them all the while than they dared to dream. He knew they wanted guidance, and so He stretched out His own hand to them in the darkness. He knew they wanted comfort, and so He bids His prophets go, saying, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people." And

He knew that the best and only consolation worth having was what God had to tell them, "Behold your God." No paraphrase, no amplification can come near the force and sweetness of these words, "Behold your God." Here I am, in your darkness, in your blindness; even in the depth of your misery and sin, here I am. Here I have ever been, and will for ever be; "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Indeed, the words "Behold your God" go deeper still than any assertions that God is here. There is an intensity about them which cannot, in other words, be so well expressed. Only a trembling child frightened by its dreams can enter into the depth of comfort when it hears its father's or mother's voice gently saying "Look at me." There is the light first, and then the real living voice, and last the real loving face which completely soothes and re-assures its heart.

Such, as I understand it, was the true function of the prophet who brought good tidings to Zion and Jerusalem, or of Zion and Jerusalem as representing the collective Hebrew Church. The Hebrew Church, through its prophets and priests, was sent to comfort the people; and the word of comfort to be spoken was simply "Behold your God." This, I take it, is the proper function also of the clergy in our own age and in our own Church especially. With its messengers scattered throughout all the cities, towns and villages of England, the machinery of proclamation is ready to our hand. We have to comfort God's

people by telling them to "Behold our God." This, I scarcely need repeat, is almost the exact opposite of the so-called Gospel message which is generally being delivered. Instead of this, the priest, persuaded of the absence of God, and of man's utter inability to hold communion with Him except through mediation and sacrifices, can only promise nearness to God through his own sacramental mysteries and his priestly intercessions. He must demand our submission to himself as the price of the benefits which he has to bestow.

But the message, "Behold your God," delivered alike to all without partiality or exclusiveness, cuts at the root of all this priestly intervention, because it denies flatly and absolutely the supposed separation between us and God. "Behold your God," if it means anything, must surely mean that God is already near to us all, that He never was absent from us, His poor children, that never at any time in the world's history was he nearer to men or doing more for their benefit than He always is and always will be. "Behold your God" means that the fault of any separation lies entirely on our side. Just as we may separate ourselves from light by closing our eyes. The light is still there shining as brightly as ever, but *we* have lost it by closing our eyes. We can only recover it by opening them again. So, in regard to the separation which is assumed between us and God, it is not God that has gone away, but that we have

closed our eyes and will not see Him. An insane person who would shut his eyes and declare that the sun had gone away, might possibly require a keeper to pretend to conjure the sun back again before he would open his eyes, and still he would think that it was the sun's changeableness which had caused the phenomena. So a man once persuaded that God had gone away from men, might require a priest to conjure back the Divine presence by some mysterious rites, before he could be persuaded of God's nearness.

"Behold your God," therefore means "use the inward eyes which God has given you for seeing Him, and you will be comforted"; it certainly does *not* mean, "If you follow my directions I will bring God back again, or take you to Him."

As clergy, then, our passage must be "Behold your God," if we would do anything to heal the breach between us and Him. Instead of mediating for them, by which we should only thrust ourselves between the petitioner and God, we should stand aside, and let the suppliant draw near for himself to the God of all comfort. Instead of offering sacrifices or pointing to sacrifices, which are supposed to appease His wrath, we should draw the sinning child to its Father's knee, and welcome it to the correction or the forgiveness which the Father knows best how to give. Instead of drawing out—to the deep degradation and loss of self-respect of the penitent—disclosures of sinful thoughts, words, and deeds which burden the guilty heart, we should say "Behold your God," and

lead our erring brother or sister to confide only to the Father's ear the misdeeds and evil thoughts which only pollute still more by confession the confessor and the confessed. Who can forgive sins but God alone, and the fellow-man against whom we have sinned? Shut God out from the reach of the penitent's cry, and then only will he cry to the poor frail priest. Preach the forgiveness of God, which consists in Divinely-wise correction and Divinely-loving pardon, and then we shall be leading men to behold their God.

If our function as teachers be to help men and women to improve their lives, it is a far better plan to tell them to behold their God, than to imply His absence by telling them He will come back some day and punish them, or that after death He will take full revenge on them for their disobedience. It is better surely to remind them of God's constant presence in their minds and souls, enlightening their reasons, and inspiring their consciences, and thus to make them reverence the Sacred Presence, in sight of which we neither dare nor desire to sin. If it be our function to heal the strifes and divisions of men—to be peacemakers rather than warriors—surely we cannot render this godly service more effectually than by proclaiming the fatherhood of God, out of which alone can spring the true brotherhood of men.

Lastly, most of all, must we so behave ourselves as that men shall see tokens of God's nearness to ourselves; and this cannot be done by merely talking

piously and being fluent in prayer and preaching; no, nor by abstaining from certain amusements which the world enjoys; but by being ourselves loving and kind, honest and truthful, brave and yet humble. By these virtues alone we shall teach our fellow-men that God's nearness to us is not a mere theory or dogma, but that it has really purified, strengthened, and comforted our own souls; and that we are therefore not merely echoing the message of other prophets, or borrowing the words of a book or Church, but are speaking out of the living experience of our hearts and lives; telling men not merely in plain words, but in the still plainer language of good deeds, that God is with us of a truth. But who is sufficient for these things? God's answer is at hand—"Behold your God."

Correspondents are requested to address as under:—

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THE
"SLING AND THE STONE."

VOL. III.

PART III.—MARCH, 1868.

ANTHROPOMORPHISM
AND
THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 19TH MAY, 1867.

EVENING, 22ND DECEMBER, 1867.

*“ Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth,
that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his
creatures.”*

JAMES i. 18.

I AM not fond of mysticism, as you know, and I think a great deal too much precious time and thought has been spent on mystic studies and interpretations. But for all that, some of the mystic emblems in the Bible are highly “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfected, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” Among these I reckon the metaphors used in the Bible about being

born again, or born from above, born of God, which help us to understand our relation to God as His dear children, although the expressions used are not literally true, but altogether figurative.

We are, as you know, obliged to speak of unseen things in figures drawn from what we see, and therefore all our expressions about God must be what is called "anthropomorphic," *i.e.*, more or less like man. We speak of God seeing us, of His eyes being in every place beholding the evil and the good, though we do not really mean that God has eyes or requires eyesight as men do. We speak of going to God in prayer, or going to Him when we die, though we know quite well that God is already as near and close to us as He ever will be. We speak of God as the righteous judge who will render to us all according to our works, and yet we do not suppose that God has a tribunal like our Courts of Justice, before which sinners will be brought up for judgment. But we use all these and other anthropomorphic forms of speech because we cannot possibly express our thoughts in any other way. And whatever God is in Himself, whatever be the mode of His own existence, we have no possibility of discovering, except through the reflections of our own nature. All our knowledge of Him must be limited to our own actual experience as men. Whatever lies beyond that is only in the region of pure fancy, and its truth or falsehood cannot be proved. The very Bible itself, however true, noble, and divine a revelation of God

it may unfold, does not and cannot surpass these limits. The very best which it says of God is still only a reflection of the best thoughts and aspirations of men—not on that account any less true or less inspired by God, but we do not admit that it contains anything which transcends human thoughts and human understanding.

Now when we use the metaphor, “being born of God,” “begotten of Him,” we are using an anthropomorphism of the highest kind. We are comparing our spiritual birth as children of God with our natural birth from our earthly parents. The relation of parents to children and of children to parents is more intimate and inevitable than any other relation among mankind. Parentage and childhood are matters of course. They exhibit the fulfilment of the most universal of the natural laws under which we all exist. And although there has been a frightful and most accursed neglect in the fulfilment of parental duties, and a sad want of parental love in the world, and a still greater amount of reckless ignorance as to the training of children, yet, on the whole, parental relations have been more generally observed than any other. Parental instincts, as they are called, are the purest and least selfish, and when a man rises to the full consciousness of his parental functions, and discharges them with equal fidelity, then he rises to the highest position which he can occupy on earth. If he is a good father in every sense of the word, he is also the best that he can be

as a man. And so, too, in cases where men and women are single, or being married have no offspring, if they act in a fatherly and motherly way when opportunity offers, they then rise into the noblest state which human nature can reach on earth. The great men whom the world delights to honour, the dashing soldiers, the adventurous sailors and discoverers, the noisy and triumphant leaders of rebellion and champions of liberty, even the sainted martyrs whose holy courage braves fire and sword—none of these famous heroes of the world are really more heroic, more self-sacrificing, more holy, more brave than those who really and truly fulfil their responsibilities as fathers and mothers. But then the standard of these is a very high one—one that is seldom reached, and therefore the heroism of a true father and mother is as rare as it is great.

There are many who can be bold and dashing, for the few who can be patient and long-suffering. There are many who have courage to bear the scourge and the stake, for the few who have the courage to deny their children's importunity, or to inflict a timely chastisement. There are many who can rise to the dignity and power of sovereignty over a people, for the few who can keep their own children in order, and bring them up wisely and well.

There have been many anthropomorphic views of God to fill men's minds. There was once a time when a fighting and selfish people just freed from captivity called their God "the Lord of Hosts," and

blessed His name for teaching their hands to war, and their fingers to fight. Time rolled on, and the pride of nationality altered the picture of the Divine character and virtues into the "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob," but not the God of Esau, or of Canaan or of Moab. Changes still more unexpected came over the feelings of the world and quieter virtues began to be admired and cultivated. To be meek, humble, kind and patient were better thought of than to be bold and overbearing and cruel; so again the views of God changed and the anthropomorphism culminated in the worship of Him who humbled himself and was meek and lowly in heart. Then came the period of persecution for the truth's sake, and after ages believed that they were following God when they followed the example of Christ in becoming martyrs for the truth. But all along the idea of God corresponded to what was deemed best among men in the successive ages of the world. What was best in themselves, they by a natural instinct attributed to their God—and they were right. Too often they mixed up with the image the baser impulses of their time, which they did not know to be base, and which only a nobler state of society could condemn, and thus the image of God was defaced by corruption which only a later age could detect and remove. The few transitions to which I have alluded are of course only a specimen of the hundreds of modifications which have been made in human conceptions of God. But all through the ages there were scattered

here and there conceptions of God infinitely more noble than those which prevailed around them. Among these we find the conception of God as the Father of men rarely but yet very plainly described; in the Book of Psalms, and in the later, Isaiah especially, this nobler anthropomorphism is distinctly set forth. "Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: Thou, O Lord, art our Father," was the cry of out-cast Edom when trodden down by the proud descendants of Abraham.

And as time grew, this nobler thought of God grew and took deeper hold on men's minds in proportion as the sacrificial system had waned, until it was proclaimed in all its force and sweetness by the prophet of Nazareth, who taught us all to pray "Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name." Observe, this is still anthropomorphism, but it is the highest and best of all. It is the noblest title among men to be a true father. It is therefore God's truest name. Could we reach a higher function than this—could human relationship furnish a field for the exercise of still nobler virtues or a still grander heroism, then; but not till then; should we give up calling God our Father, and find for Him a newer and truer name.

But though this nobleness of the human relation was at the root of our conception of God as a Father, it is not by any means the sole ground in which it stands. And here I am coming to the main subject of my text, which, as it were, explains the fact of God's

Fatherhood, and is in my opinion a bit of mysticism worth having and worth thinking about.

The text asserts that God, of His own free will, begat us by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits or beginning of his creatures. Now the metaphor is this. As a father (of his own will) begets children by the process of natural generation, so God, the Father of the spirits of all flesh, begets children in the persons of earthly children by the infusion into them of His word of truth. Take any human child, *e.g.*, he is already a product of his father's will, and as such only he is a human animal. God now takes the child and begets a spirit in him which is indeed a new birth—a birth from above. How does God beget this new child? By the word of truth. God puts His word or voice in connection with the human faculties already born of an earthly parent, and the result is now a child of God as well as a child of man. The child's body is the child of his earthly parents; the child's mind and spirit is the child of God. I am far too ignorant of these deep mysteries to divide the faculties of the human soul into those which come by natural birth and those which come by being born of God. I leave that to people who profess to know everything about God and man and to know all the differences between them. But I think we cannot be wrong in saying that, 1st, Conscience; 2nd, Reason or Intelligence; and 3rd, Affection or Love, are, at all events, Divine rather than human; that a child born of earthly

parents, and kept away from all God's word of truth in every shape, would grow up worse than a savage—would have no conscience, no intelligence, no love. As it is, scarcely any savages in the world are quite destitute of these, but they manifest them in exact proportion to their impregnation by God's word of truth. By God's word of truth, I do not mean only the Bible—in one sense I do not mean the Bible at all—but the *true thoughts* and holy feelings which enter the mind or soul of man by what we call the inspiration of God. All these terms are figurative, you remember, but we cannot help it—we cannot express these ideas in any other way. Now what I mean by inspiration of God is this. It is God making a man feel the truth of anything—the rightness of anything, or the beauty of anything. To say “God is love,” or “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thy neighbour as thyself,” this is not inspiration. They are words uttered by one who was no doubt inspired by them, but the words themselves may be inspired or uninspired a thousand times over. We may read or repeat them for years without their being inspired. They are never inspired until a man *feels* the truth and *rightness* of them in his own heart. Then they are inspired, or rather he is inspired by them.

So when a man *feels* that he ought to do as he would be done by, then he is inspired. He is born of God, God has made him into His own child by speaking this word of truth into his heart. All true

convictions give a divine life to us. Our perception of truths of science, of truths of morality, and of truths of theology, if they are real convictions, raise us from children of men to be children of God.

And so God, the great unseen Creator, has wedded to Himself the great visible universe, and out of that mystical marriage has come as offspring the human family—a race of beings noble even as animals, but surpassing all we yet know of created life in being born of God—very God of very God—begotten not made—a statement as true of us all as of Him who was called the first-born among many brethren, and who quoted in proof of his own sonship those ancient words, “I said ye are gods and ye are all the children of the Most High.”

In every peopled planet I do not doubt that God has done the same, and that there, as here, He has led up out of chaos the wonderful developments of human race, in order that every world may have children of God as its keepers and guardians, its tillers and its replenishers, and carry on His own glorious work of bringing everything at last to perfection. But we are as yet only in the very beginning of His great creation, the last new-born infants in His boundless home, and so we cannot doubt that those who were first cradled in those Divine arms have now reached glorious heights of being far beyond our highest aspirations, and that for us too there shall be everlasting life and glory and blessedness, as we grow more and more like Him and rise higher and higher in conscience, reason, and love.



PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 29TH DECEMBER, 1867.

*“ Whither shall I go then from thy spirit, or whither
shall I go then from thy presence.”*

PSALM cxxxix. 6.

THE writer of this Psalm has conferred an immense obligation on mankind by this expression of his thankfulness for God's unceasing and universal presence.

We are struck, too, on reading it to find that this thought of God's nearness, instead of inspiring fear and dread, filled his mind with gladness and gratitude. He speaks of it as something inconceivable solemn, and even as overpowering the faculties of the human

mind; but still for all that, as something for which he might entirely rejoice and give thanks.

There was no attempt on his part to disguise his own sinfulness, or to excuse his misdeeds. He owns frankly enough that God knows his most secret thoughts, every word on his tongue, and every deed of his life. He confesses that there is no escape from God's deep search of his whole being; that, go where he will, and be what he may, he is ever surrounded and confronted by that awful presence, the presence of Him who had laid His hand upon him, and had fashioned him from his mother's womb. But in all this there is no word of terror or alarm, nothing but solemn reverence and grateful love. "I will give thanks unto Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. How dear are Thy counsels unto me, O God: O how great is the sum of them!" Instead of trying to evade God's searching glance, or to hide his own imperfections under a robe of righteousness which was not his own, he prays, "Search me, O God, and try the ground of my heart; prove me and examine my thoughts; look well if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

There was no self-righteousness here, neither was there any fleeing for refuge to another saviour who might screen him from God's searching judgment. There was no presumptuous treading on holy ground, as if he were quite worthy to enter into God's sanc-

tuary, neither was there any shrinking from that merciful presence which God himself had already forced upon him. If God had come so near as this unasked, unsought, he would never turn away from it, even if he could, to seek the protection or to gain the intercession of one more holy than himself. This sense of God's presence, and this entire confidence in it, coupled with a sense of our own faults, is in my opinion the supreme ideal of religion. It is, of course, pure faith, originated in the heart of man by God, independent of books, churches, priests, and is the only real revelation possible by God to man.

I cannot avoid the duty of pointing out the great contrast between this true religious feeling and that false one which is implied in much of the teaching which is called Christian. Take Dr. Watts's hymns as an illustration. He, like the Psalmist, believed in the constant presence and watchfulness of God; but, unlike the Psalmist, he drew from it chiefly terror and dread, thus dishonouring God and undermining the very foundations of morality. His words are these :—

Almighty God ! Thy piercing eye
Strikes through the shades of night ;
And our most secret actions lie
All open to Thy sight.

There's not a sin that we commit,
Nor wicked word we say,
But in thy dreadful book 'tis writ
Against the judgment day.

And must the crimes that I have done,
 Be read and published there,
 Be all exposed before the sun,
 While men and angels hear ?

Lord! at Thy foot ashamed I lie,
 Upward I dare not look,
 Pardon my sins before I die,
 And blot them from Thy book !

Remember all the dying pains,
 That my Redeemer felt,
 And let His blood wash out my stains,
 And answer for my guilt !

These are views which my life is spent in opposing ; and if you will give your attention to the contrast between them and the simple faith expressed by the author of the 139th Psalm, I think you will not wonder that I should be so anxious to point out that contrast to others, and to lead them to abandon the false view for the true one.

For what is the real difference between them ? In one case, the thought of God's presence gives joy and thankfulness, and a desire to be made righteous for righteousness' sake. In the other case, the thought of God's presence gives alarm and dread, and a desire to be sheltered from God, and to be considered righteous for the merits of another, when all the while one is still unrighteous.

I know well on which side the suffrages of the best of mankind would be given if these two views of God were put to the vote. I know that, in spite of the

influence of priests and ministers of religion, in spite of much self-condemnation which is right and true the heart of man, as God made it, would at once declare that it is more in accordance with the Creator's will that the hearts of His creatures should rejoice in His presence than that they should quail and shrink before it as a threatening power. I know too that the best of men, if not all men, believe in their hearts that it is better to desire to be made righteous than to desire to be accounted righteous; that it is better to go boldly to God's footstool with the prayer "Cleāse thou me from my secret faults," than to go to Jesus saying, "Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee." I trust to the fundamental integrity of the human heart as well as to the common sense of the human mind to prefer the former to the latter, to go straight to the God who made us, and ask for grace to grow righteous, rather than to run away from God to another Saviour to shelter them in their unrighteousness. And every man living will own that the faith in God's presence which makes men joyful and glad, is a far higher one than that faith in it which makes them afraid.

If this be so, it will be admitted on all sides that the faith expressed in this and some other Psalms is immeasurably higher and better than the faith expressed in many of our modern hymns. It will be admitted also that what some call the Christian Religion is very far inferior to that of the Psalmists and of Jesus Christ Himself. For He never made the presence of

God a ground for terror; still less did He ever invite any one to come to Him to be sheltered from God's righteous judgment. This was a later invention for which Jesus is certainly not responsible.

But now let me briefly speak of what God's presence with us means. There is a spirit in man which we cannot see; we are only made sure of its being there when it manifests itself in words and deeds. When the body of a man is dead, the spirit of that man has departed from that body—invisible still, but after death unable to make any manifestation to us who survive. But we do not the less believe in such a spirit because we cannot see it, or know what or where it is. We do not even know whether it is in any one place or in all places at once. But this entire ignorance of what the spirit of man is, does not prevent our believing that all men and women are spirits clothed in a body during this mortal life, for we know that this is true of ourselves. Each man knows that he has a spirit—that he is indeed a spirit, and that he dwells in a human body by which he walks and talks, and works all the deeds of human life. And because man is a spirit, he learns to believe that God is a spirit, different only in this that God is not clothed in a body as we are, and that He is the boundless spirit which knows all things and is everywhere present, while we are very small and limited in our knowledge, and while here on earth we are confined to one place beyond which we cannot go. The spirits of men we believe to be the children of the one Great Father Spirit, to be, in a sense, born

or begotten of Him, and partaking of His divine nature and endless life. "For love is of God, and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." There are, however, two errors to guard against—one is the error of believing that God has a body and occupies only one place in the universe, just like the bodies of men, which can only be in one place at one time. The other error is in thinking that because he has not a body, and is always everywhere at once, therefore He has no distinct individual existence. The former error leads us to the grossest anthropomorphism and into a disbelief in His constant regard for us, and presence with us; the latter error destroys all possibility of His caring for men, or being a suitable object of our love and worship. It is ridiculous to pretend affection for a mere power or force, which is not capable of receiving love or giving it in return; still more ridiculous to offer prayers and praises to it. We may have a great and profound reverence for absolute power, but we cannot love it or pray to it. We reverence, and we delight in witnessing the results of human skill and wisdom, but we never think of such folly as loving skill and wisdom, and offering to these the worship of our souls. They cannot receive love nor give it. Skill and wisdom are abstractions. They cannot exist apart from some being—human or otherwise. So if God be only a power or force controlling the universe, all affection between us and Him would be not only impossible but absurd. Hence, by the

study of our own spirits, we learn that God is something more than mere power or wisdom. He *possesses* power and wisdom; these are parts of His nature or the agents of His will, but they are not Himself, just as skill and wisdom are attributes of some men. He must, at least, as a spirit be distinct from all other spirits, even from those He has begotten, just as a father is distinct from his children, though he and they are alike in nature. He must also be conscious; God must have a mind or *be* a mind which knows Himself and knows every other thing and being too. He must be capable of giving affection, because it is an established fact that He is capable of inspiring it. He has made men to love Himself, He must therefore be capable of loving and of receiving love with pleasure. The misuse of the word person as applied to God or Gods is at the root of some men's horror of calling God anything but a power or force. They know how absurd it is to suppose that God is a person in the sense in which men and women are persons, being in only one place at a time, and so they have fallen into the opposite error of denying individuality, consciousness, and affection to be attributes of God.

But as God's nature can only be purely spiritual—and by this term we cannot define what God is, or what spirit is, only what it is not—as God is only spiritual, His influence on men is only spiritual too. His dwelling here on earth in bodily form cannot bring Him nearer to men's hearts than He always is

and has been. The outward manifestations of any amount of miracle and wonder would never speak so plainly and loudly to the spirit of man as He has all along spoken by the "still small voice" of His spirit in our consciences. No interference with the general laws of nature can persuade the spirit of man of His presence more effectually than it is already persuaded by the guiding and warning voice within us.

What we need, then, is to learn that this inward voice is the Word of God, and so to awaken to our real and never-failing bliss. The sense of sin which we shall never quite lose if we are only listening to that voice, will only bring us nearer and oftener to His feet. Instead of terror and superstitious schemes for redemption, we shall find our only hope and joy to be in Him who will never leave us nor forsake us, and our only redemption to be in His patient and loving correction of our faults. To think of God as always hovering over us, and, as it were, nursing our souls in His everlasting arms, will do more to purify our thoughts and words and deeds than any threats of His Divine vengeance, or any wicked falsehoods of His watching us only to take note of our sins. To look to Him that we may grow more and more like Him from day to day will bring us to His image better and sooner than any effort to hide our defects under an imputed righteousness, or to gain His favour by the intercessions of one more lenient than Himself.

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THE
"SLING AND THE STONE."

VOL. III.

PART IV.—APRIL, 1868.

THE FRUIT OF FAITH.

AND

BRIBES AND THREATS.

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 5TH JANUARY, 1868.

“ Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”

MATTHEW iv. 17.

You have heard a great deal from me lately of the exceeding nearness of God to men—nay, even of His absolute indwelling in the hearts of His children. It is true that I have dwelt hitherto on this article of our faith chiefly to point out the danger and falseness of those views which are at the root of all priestcraft and mediation, and which imply that God is distant from us and needs to be reconciled to us. But I should be sorry if an impression were left on your minds that this is all we could gain from a belief in our union with God. It would be a poor sort of faith if it only made us

antagonistic to a priestly system, and left us inwardly and socially no better than we were before.

This faith in God's nearness to us, when heartily embraced, has far greater value than that of merely setting us free from human systems of religion and from slavery to a priesthood. It so raises us that we can no longer lie contented in carelessness and sin. It so opens our eyes to the blessed presence of the Father of our spirits, as to cleanse the thoughts of our hearts and to make us aspire to walk worthy of our high calling as His sons. If God be indeed already with us, and we are ever near and dear to Him, the knowledge of it makes us feel a loathing for the sinful impulses of our lower nature which we never felt before; and we are inspired with a new hope that we shall conquer sin and grow daily in newness and righteousness of life.

To the men to whom Jesus preached the glad tidings of their Father's constant love and care, He also preached Repentance. He told them of all those great blessings which the Father had already bestowed upon them, in order to kindle within them a desire to submit themselves to the Divine will, to love the thing which He commanded, and to long for what He had promised.

Though men were indeed unworthy of having God for their Father, yet the fact of His being so was beyond all dispute, and men had only need to see it and believe in it, in order to cease to do evil and to learn to do well. To tell them simply that they were

the children of God was enough to show them in a moment, what they ought to try to do and what they should endeavour to become.

It is true that the words "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" have generally been interpreted in a sense widely different from that in which we may now understand them. They may at first have been understood to mean that God's kingdom was not come, but it was coming and was near at hand. The words may have meant that a new outward order of things was to be instituted, and that many of the evils and discomforts of life were to disappear—that as a devil was believed to have had complete rule over the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, he would be soon dethroned, and a King of righteousness crowned in his place. To the oppressed Jew, Galilean and Samaritan, it may have meant the overthrow of the Roman empire and the inauguration of the reign of a real Messiah on the throne of David. So, in later times, it may have been understood to imply the speedy return of Jesus in the clouds to rule over the world in a millennium of happiness.

These were of course all erroneous ideas, proved to be so by the course of events which have marked the good providence of God. The mischief done by such false interpretation was not only that which is always occasioned by error, but it was worse still in obscuring and covering up in darkness the real truth about the Kingdom of Heaven. Men were still looking for it,

as something which had not come; they were still expecting it as something outside of them, although Jesus himself had said plainly enough, "The kingdom of God *is* within you." It will take many ages, I fear, still, before men will give up the idea of looking forward to something outside and beyond themselves to deliver the world from its woes and sins. Thousands of even godly and useful men, whose lives are a constant effort to promote God's kingdom on earth, still cling to the secret hope of some great crisis which shall suddenly bring the Most High into His temple, and finish at a stroke the great work at which they and all the faithful have been so long and so patiently toiling. We are all more or less tainted by this error; we catch ourselves sometimes counting on some great struggle, or on some great political or international revolution, as if it were to solve all our perplexities, to decide the world's destiny, and to make the course of our own pet schemes run smoothly for evermore. But, after all, this is only the same old error in another form. The order of Providence has been that each individual and each successive age shall bear its own burden in the work of the world; that although some shall reap what others have sown, yet that they shall not get it without reaping — not without an equal share of labour and toil; that the gains in knowledge, which posterity inherits, shall only be secured and made useful by as much care and diligence as was expended by their forefathers in acquiring it.

God has ordered it that not only each man, but every generation in succession shall "work out its own salvation;" that each must trade with the talents entrusted to it, or be left at last in want and disgrace. In this way we are reproved for leaning too much on the past, or for hoping too eagerly in the good chances of the future. "The Kingdom of Heaven is within us." We make our own lives our heaven or hell, just as we frame them for God's will, or for the mere indulgence of our selfish desire.

And if we are working for great ends, hoping to make the world at last as it should be, the home of God's children on earth, we must not look for external aid in the crises of events, or in the advent of a deliverer; but patiently, humbly, do the work of to-day and live the best life possible to us in the present, trusting in the wisdom of God's plan to build up stone by stone the glorious temple of perfected humanity.

For, after all, the "nearness of God's Kingdom" to us *now* is the loudest call to Repentance which can ever reach us. We might have urged as some excuse that, as far as we knew, the good time had not yet come, that God's Kingdom, though near, was still away from us; that His rule, however much desired, was still not yet set up in our hearts, and that the great shaking which was to overturn the spiritual wickedness in high places, and to dethrone the rulers of this world's darkness, had not yet brought the deliverance we longed for. But now all this is

changed. We know that we have now, and to-day, all the chances for doing God's will which can ever come to us on earth; all the help we need for it that we can ever get; all the control and sovereignty which the Lord and King of Love will ever exert over our free-born hearts.

We have all that God sees to be sufficient. There is nothing to wait for but what we have already. We have only to open our eyes to see it and stretch forth our hands and take it.

"Repent," says the voice of God, "for I am with you. Begin to change yourselves from debased and grovelling animals into noble and aspiring men—into sons of God—because I am with you. You have my voice in your hearts, and my laws of Love are there engraved; my Kingdom is set up within you, and you need no longer live the life of a slave. I know all your frame, how much you can bear, every sin that you will commit, every duty from which you will shrink, every temptation which is too mighty for you. But I know also that you can grow perfect, strong, and self-sacrificing. I know that you can forego many sinful pleasures and rise calmly above many fretting anxieties; that you can conquer sin by little and little; and that temptation will not be always so strong as it is now, but that your moral nature, which is as eternal as my own life, must resist at length every allurement and break through every snare."

"Therefore Repent. Leave off what you know to be wrong. For I alone, the God of righteousness,

have been with you to make you feel the wrongness of it. Set yourselves to do what you know to be right though the doing of it be most painful; because I the Lord have inspired your hearts and your will to do it. Though I claim, as a Father, your entire surrender to my will, I make no threats, I offer no bribes. I command you to do the right thing and to abstain from the evil, only because I love you, and you must trust to My wisdom and listen to My word in your hearts. I wait for a willing obedience, because no other sort can be obedience at all. I wait, too, because I have made and formed you for this great end, that you may be perfectly good; and every other end must be set aside for this, yea even your own happiness and the happiness of your fellow-men. I will lead you, after many failures, in the paths of righteousness for My name's sake."

In some such, spirit and meaning God's voice speaks in our hearts. We have not listened to it as we should, not heeding that it was God himself who spake. We have not much cared to obey it, because other voices more clamorous drowned the Divine call within us. Fellow-men without, and natural desires within, have together helped to persuade us that God was too far off to be heard on earth, or that His voice could not be distinguished in the strife of tongues in which we have been embroiled. But God's voice is at length the loudest and most powerful of them all; it is like "the hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces," or the fire which smoulders when it

cannot blaze, and dries up inch by inch the fuel which it is bent on devouring. We cannot escape it; we cannot be for ever deaf to its gentle entreaties.

To have learned that He is near, and that He is really speaking in our consciences, our reasons and our hearts, is a great step indeed towards repentance. At least it makes more solemn the inner warnings and misgivings of our guilty souls, and it gives us a good hope that if we follow that voice, we shall gain strength as we go.

There are still sorrowful ones whose many falls make them despair of an abiding repentance, but for them we hear an echo of God's voice in the heart of one of old. "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 16TH FEBRUARY, 1868.

“ He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe ; in my name shall they cast out devils ; they shall speak with new tongues ; they shall take up serpents ; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them ; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”

MARK xvi. 16, 17, 18.

THE promise of salvation, and the threat of damnation in the first of these three verses have been long used by the priests of Christendom to bribe or threaten the laity into obedience. They are quoted from one of the four gospels, they are recorded as the words

of Jesus Christ himself after his resurrection, and the clergy have done their best to conceal from the people that there was ever a doubt raised as to their authenticity. It is now, however, generally admitted that these words were not written by the author of the Gospel according to St. Mark, that the whole paragraph from the ninth to the last verse of this chapter was added by a later hand. There are some who believe that these verses did form part of the original Gospel, but then they consider that the whole gospel itself was written in the second century, and was merely a compilation from the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Still it is worthy of remark that from a very early age these verses were thrown out as not properly belonging to the gospel, and that in our own day eminent critics of style are convinced that they were written by a different hand to that which wrote the rest of the Book.

To us, however, I hope it is a very small matter who wrote them, or who first uttered such words of useless spite—because the spirit of them is entirely at variance with the spirit of Him who preached the sermon on the Mount, and who said that He had come to seek and to save that which was lost—because, moreover, the belief or disbelief of certain doctrines is not voluntary, and therefore neither moral nor immoral. We only believe as our reasons are convinced, and we cannot possibly force ourselves to believe anything which we consider to be untrue. If a man could be driven into any belief by the hope of reward

or by the fear of suffering, it could only be possible by the crushing of his reason altogether or by making him for the time insane.

Standing by themselves the words, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned," carry their own refutation. The human spirit of bigotry and oppression is far too manifest in them for us to think for a moment that they were uttered by inspiration of God. But their very vagueness and uncertainty lead us to treat them with no little contempt, for we are not even told by them what we should believe, or what baptism we are to be baptised with. In the verse preceding it, we certainly read the words quoted from St. Matthew, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." But what *is* the gospel? Is it what Jesus taught or what the apostles taught? Is it what St. Paul, or St. Peter, or St. James or St. John taught, for all these have a different gospel as regards the doctrines on which they insisted. Again—Is the gospel a history of a person, or a list of dogmas, or a code of morals? The word means a message from God—God's spell—God's message. Is this message something about Himself, or about Jesus, or about the Church, or about our own duty? I might give you *my* idea of the gospel, and a thousand clergy in fifty successive generations will all give you a different account of *their* ideas of it. So this imposing, pretentious and alarming threat about believing or not believing becomes simply an empty phrase

which no one has a right to fill with a sense of his own, and which all of us together can never agree on interpreting.

I know there are some things called gospel which if I were to believe, whether baptised or not, would lead me far enough away from true peace with God, and from the hope of being made pure even as He is pure; and there are other things which I do not believe, though men call them gospel, and which I would continue to deny in spite of all threats of damnation. To my Maker I owe the first duty of not being a liar to myself—of believing only what seems to me true and reasonable—of denying or doubting what seems to me false and unreasonable.

How I wish we could penetrate the whole body of the church with this revolt against bribes and threatenings! Men ought surely to see, now, how degrading it is to receive offers of eternal happiness on the condition of believing some doctrine or creed, and how still more degrading to be treated openly as cowards, by being intimidated into belief by threats of damnation. It is however certain that this system of bribes and threats does more than any other thing to keep men from searching for the truth, and from believing it when it is found. The reasoning powers are undermined, and the conscience darkened, whenever selfish motives are allowed to influence the operations of mental enquiry. We cannot see things as they are, nor be convinced by what is true, while we are hoping

to gain reward, or to avoid pain by the convictions at which we may arrive.

I believe that if you thoroughly agree with me as to the principle of having our minds left free to the proper influence of truth, you will be satisfied that the words, "He that believeth," etc., are not God's words, but most likely the words of some poor human priest, who had many craven souls at his feet and wanted to have more. Yet if any lingering doubt should remain, I have nothing to do but to read the next two verses, and then ask you to form your own opinion as to whether any part of the text is worthy of credit. "And these signs shall follow them that believe"—the word for "follow" would be more correctly rendered "attend," or "go with," which makes the meaning still more emphatic—these signs shall attend them that believe. "In my name shall they cast out devils, they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover."

That is, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved," and these are the signs which shall go with them that believe. These are the tokens by which a man shall know that he has the true faith, and by which he shall be able to convince other people that he is a true believer. We will consider these signs presently, but just notice first that the promise is not confined to apostles alone, but to all who believe. They were to go into all the world

and preach the gospel to every creature, and whoever believed and was baptised should be saved, and whoever believed not should be damned; moreover, whoever believed were to be accompanied with certain magical gifts or powers of working miracles. The promise is made to us, if we only believe, just as it was made to every one else who should believe. There is not even a hint at any distinction between one set of believers and another, or between any one generation and another. The terms are simply, "Believe, and you shall work these miracles."

And now let us briefly examine these "signs,"—these magical powers. First "they should cast out devils in the name of Jesus." Passing by the impossibility of casting out devils when there are no devils to cast out, let us understand it to mean, as it meant in the days of the apostles, merely healing diseases, curing fits, dumbness, deafness, etc. Need I say that these cures are now wrought only by medical men, and that only in accordance with certain strict rules of science? Does this prove that the medical men believe, and that we do not believe? The next sign is, "they shall speak with new, or strange tongues." The power of speaking foreign languages is common to nearly all men, but they can never do so without first *learning* a foreign language. More or less study is invariably necessary in proportion to the difficulty of the language and the natural gifts of the learner. No one ever did speak, so as to be understood, any foreign tongue which he had not previously learnt.

Are then those who are learned in foreign languages believers, while those who cannot speak any but their native tongue are unbelievers?"

The next sign is, "They shall take up serpents." This wonderful feat, which we sometimes but rarely see exhibited in our travelling menageries, is common enough in the East, where serpents abound, and where the secret of rendering them harmless is well known. Men of very different creeds in India and Persia, Egypt and Turkey go about conjuring, and part of their performance is this very sign of taking up serpents. You and I could not do it safely, unless it be true that all the serpents thus exhibited have had the venom-bag extracted before the performance. Shall we think that only these eastern conjurors are believers, and that we are not believers because we cannot imitate their tricks! Let us pass to the next sign, "If they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them." I am reminded here that Jesus himself would not run the risk of killing himself by casting himself down from the top of the temple. Yet here we find one of his followers telling us that Jesus said "the believer might drink any deadly thing without its hurting him."

With the single exception of the conjuror, I know no one who would venture to prove his faith by taking deadly things into his mouth. Not even the conjuror dares to swallow poison; though he appears to eat glass and fire and sharp needles and pins; yet I do not know of his taking prussic acid or strychnine

with equal impunity. According to the text, however, if you believe, you will never be poisoned, no poison can harm you, if you believe. If your faith would not bear that test, it is *not* the faith of which the writer spoke, when he said, "He that believeth shall be saved."

Lastly, we come to the sign. "They shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover." If this be true, where is our faith? Who thinks now of sending for believers to lay hands on the sick? Who would not rather send for a doctor, or go at once and buy medicine from the chemist? My friends, the faith of which my text speaks is gone from the world at large, and what is more, any one trying to walk by this faith, and not by common sense, would become first the laughing stock of his neighbours, and perhaps soon afterwards the inmate of a lunatic asylum or a gaol. But nothing seems too strange to happen. Not many weeks ago, a poor man and woman lost their child through inflammation of the lungs, and the coroner's inquest decided that death had been the result of their having neglected to use proper remedies and to call in medical aid. When questioned as to this matter, they frankly owned that they were members of a religious body called the "Peculiar People," and that they thought it right to act strictly according to the words of the Bible, and wrong to seek for medical aid. They had read in St. James that if any one were sick, they should call for the Elders of the Church to pray over him, and anoint him with oil,

and that the prayer of faith would heal the sick, and the Lord would raise him up. They had read also in these verses of my text that if any one believed, the mere laying of his hands on a sick person would heal him, and he should recover.

These poor people only did what the Bible tells us to do, and they believed it was the word of God. How can we blame them? We call them deluded. Yes, but by whom have they been deluded? And how long ago is it that we all used to accept everything in the Bible as gospel — as God's message to erring men? How long ago is it since 11,000 of our own clergy signed a declaration of their belief that every word in the Bible was God's word? And yet these very clergy would not be the last to scoff at the poor sect of "Peculiar People" for being credulous enough and consistent enough, to carry out into their lives the religious faith they professed. (I wonder which of our Archbishops and Bishops would be bold enough to say that he believed that the first woman was made out of one of the first man's ribs?)

If the words of my text are God's words, let us put them at once to the test; if we will not handle serpents, or take strychnine, let us at least try the experiment, when we are ill, of sending for some believer to lay hands on us, or for the Elders of the Church to come and pray over us and anoint us with oil. But if we will not try this simple experiment, if we are afraid to risk even a prolonged illness by the neglect of proper remedies, let us be honest enough

to say, We do not believe these words of the Bible; and the Bible is not entirely to be trusted without the exercise of our reason and our common sense.

True faith in God, remember, is not a faith into which we may be either bribed or frightened, nor will it ever enable us to override those laws of God which He has already established for the well-being of man. It will, if anything, lead us to study those laws that we may the better obey them, and will keep our hearts and minds free from cowardice, free from dishonesty and free from credulity, as well as free from self-willed resistance of His providence, whenever our turn comes for the decay and dissolution of our frail flesh.

To the offerer of bribes and to the hurler of threats we can equally turn with contemptuous indifference, and say, "Your heaven is not worth having at the price of reason; your hell is not so terrible as being corrupted at the core." "We know in whom we have believed, and will commit our souls unto Him in well-doing as unto a faithful Creator."

THE
"SLING AND THE STONE."

VOL. III.

PART V.—MAY, 1868.

THE RELIGION OF LOVE.

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 23RD FEBRUARY, 1868.

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”

1 COR. xiii. 1, 2, 3.

THESE words of the epistle for the day furnish a most pleasing contrast to the words at the end of St. Mark's gospel, which we were considering last Sunday. There it was all faith and nothing but faith

and signs of faith. *Here* it is all love and nothing but love and signs of love. In the gospel we were bribed to believe by offers of salvation, and threatened with damnation for disbelieving. St. Paul, on the contrary, makes short work of faith, has no bribes to offer, no threatenings to hurl, but only dwells on the extreme blessedness of love. In the gospel referred to, the signs of faith were specially detailed, and their great value as tokens of a saving faith was implied. Here in the epistle, St. Paul mentions some of these very signs, speaking with tongues, working of miracles, etc., and says that if he possessed all these powers, and yet was destitute of love, he would be nothing. Observe, he does not say he would be damned for the want of love, but he would be worse than that—he would be nothing at all.

This contrast is positively delightful to meet with, as it expresses in better language, and with infinitely greater depth than I could have said it, the very principle which I so earnestly wished to impress upon you last Sunday. We want to take Religion altogether out of the reach of bribes and threatenings, and to show that it consists in trying to be right for righteousness' sake ; that we only mean by the word Salvation, being renewed or improved in one's own character and motives; that the faith and theological accomplishments so much thought of have as little to do with true religion as with true science ; that all the working of miracles and the gifts of preaching and praying, and talking religiously, may

be enjoyed by one who is still entirely destitute of any divine life in the sight of God, *i.e.*, who is without love, and therefore without life.

We might hear the Apostle say over again to us in the spirit of this epistle,—Those bribes and threatenings about faith and those promises that the believer should work miracles, belong only to the childhood of humanity. When you talk about “he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned,” you are speaking as a child, understanding as a child, thinking only as a child; when you look for miracles as signs of faith in any age, much less in an age like ours, you are only dealing with childish things, and amusing yourself without any profit to anybody. But now you are men, you must put away childish things. You must see that there is something infinitely nobler, infinitely more manly required of men than seeking to be saved or to escape damnation. You must now be aware that the aim and purpose of your creation was to make you as noble and unselfish as it is possible for a creature to be, to make you do right from pure love of righteousness, to make you full of real love, real generosity of nature, for the sake of being so, and not for any ulterior reward. It is required of you as men that you will put away childish views of the purposes of your creation and of your destiny, that you will detect the smallness and childishness of what is dear to priests and fanatics, and learn to value what is precious in the sight of God and in the hearts of

upright men. Gifts of eloquence, gifts of prophecy, *i.e.*, of teaching, gifts of deep understanding in the mysteries of nature, theology, or metaphysics, even a faith which can remove mountains, and a bounty which would lead you to bestow all your goods to feed the poor, or a bold zeal which would carry you triumphantly to the stake,—all these, however good and useful in themselves, do not qualify men for LIFE, *i.e.*, for life as God measures it, for living as men are created by Him on purpose to live. You are nothing without love. By this, and this alone, can you be judged. By this, and this alone, can you find any place in the eternal life which is the gift of God.

With no uncertain sound, then, does St. Paul appeal to his friends at Corinth. He is not content with giving a few illustrations of what love is, and then leaving them to win their way over the more favourite theological subjects ; but he boldly says, all those things which are so highly accounted of are absolutely worthless without love ; love alone gives to each man his due place, or any place at all, in the realm of life.

But it is not because these gifts, or this faith, are entirely worthless in themselves, but because they have nothing to do with the condition of life as measured and valued by God. Gifts of tongues, of knowledge, of teaching, of understanding, yea, even of faith, of bounty, and of devotion to a righteous cause, are all in themselves excellences which we are bound to cultivate, and which help to enlarge and elevate our whole natures. But what is necessary to observe

is that these gifts and endowments leave us still in the purely animal or human condition of things. With these alone, we have no immortality, no share in the life of God which is eternal. These gifts are like health and beauty, and fleetness and strength, which are gone as soon as the touch of Death is laid upon us. Now faith which helps us so much to live, and to work, and to be good, and bountiful hands which help to make other lives happy, and daring hearts which will live and die in the defence of truth, however much these may ennoble us, for aught we know, they still leave us mortal; they serve their purpose on earth, they help us to fulfil our several functions as passing members of succeeding ages, but it is not certain that they can render us immortal, or weave a single web that shall bear the strain of the last great wrench.*

But this is not what St. Paul wanted us to dwell upon so much as upon our present condition in the sight of God. He did not want us to be full of charity for the sake even of immortality. He was thinking rather of our present condition under the eye of God. It was not that God Himself despised the gifts which He had given, that God thought meanly of the acquirements which He had Himself given us the faculties to gain—that God despised the faith which He had inspired, or was not

* I hope I shall not be misunderstood here to imply that the gift of immortality is contingent upon any merit, whether of faith or love. It is my impression that immortal life is love in the same sense as we say that "God is love."

pleased with our deeds of bounty which we performed only at His bidding at the impulse of sympathy, nor again that God would not feel pleased with the courage which the love of His own truth has inspired. But it was that God saw that without love all these gifts might be, and surely would be, perverted; that unless a man really loved others, his gifts and acquirements would make him tenfold more dangerous as a selfish or hostile member of society; that without love, his very knowledge of nature's mysteries and his understanding of theological or metaphysical riddles would only puff him up and make him at first contemptuous, and at last contemptible; that without love, his very faith would make him censorious, conceited, cruel — that he would be always boasting of his own favour with God, and ever ready to banish or to burn all who did not believe exactly as he believed. His very bountifulness would become mere self-indulgence, or practised only for sake of ostentation. And were he a martyr for the truth's sake, without love he would only be a bigot turned inside out, or would go to the stake thinking more of his own prowess, and of the greatness of his own self-sacrifice, than of the cause for which he was dying, or for the poor ignorant ones whom he was dying to set free.

Thus, not a single gift or endowment of man but what may become a positive evil and a source of injury to others, if love be wanting from the nature into which those gifts have been poured. Love thus

becomes, as it were, the leaven in human nature which lightens and raises all the rest. Love is in a peculiar sense the gift of God, though all other advantages of course are gifts; but they are gifts of human skill to enrich our earthly lives, while love is the gift of divine life to make us immortal—the imparting to us of God's own nature to make true men of us—true sons of God—to keep all bright and true and pure in our hearts and lives.

I think the Apostle meant this when he said that without love he was nothing; and that although faith, hope, and love were still abiding as necessary for the truly Christian life, yet the greatest of all was love. • Because love gave its value to each and all of the other gifts and graces of, the human mind and character.

And you will not fail to observe that the love here spoken of is not love to God, but only and simply love to men. God does not need our love in the same sense as men have need of it. The Apostle, in these few verses, almost, if not entirely, covers the whole range of human obligations and human relations without touching on any thing which may be *technically* called religious. (See 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5, 6, 7.)

A purer faith may do much to remedy the ills of this present time—to soften down differences and to heal strifes; a wider knowledge and a deeper understanding of nature's mysteries will surely tend to bring all men who love what is true into bonds of

cloſer friendship, and make them more united in their efforts to promote the general welfare. A greater readiness and gladness to distribute to those who are really in want would not be the least among the signs of improvement in an age and country where money is worshipped even to madness. And a more disinterested devotion to what is true, a more manly courage in braving the sneers and curses which are the portion of all true reformers, would help much to sweeten the corrupted atmosphere of a stifling conventionality; but all these are poor nostrums for the renovation of society and the progress of the race as compared with that simple, plodding, up-hill work of private love between man and man at home, in the field, in the market, and in professional and public service. If we could but get ourselves to *feel* and to *live*, not merely to do and to say, *but to feel and live*, in accordance with the slight sketch of love given us in this Epistle, we should soon find what a heaven could be made out of this afflicted world, and all the natural and acquired gifts which now adorn the human race would grow faster and stronger, to keep pace with the demands of a Godlike love which is as insatiable in its unselfishness as it is almighty and immortal.

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 26TH JANUARY, 1868.

*“ Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye
upon Him while He is near.”*

ISAIAH lv. 6.

THERE are various ways in which we may be said to “seek the Lord.” The man of science seeks God through his observations of the wonderful works and operations of Nature, and by the exercise chiefly of his intellect. The theologian seeks God in studying the various systems of religious belief, or, more exclusively, the system in which he has been trained; and in this case, also, by the exercise of his intellect. The philosopher seeks God by the severest analysis of the operations of the human mind, and by the

study of human views of duty, commonly known as ethics, or morals; still, like the others, by the exercise chiefly of his intellect. But few comparatively are men of science, few are theologians, in the strict sense of the term, and fewer still are philosophers. The great bulk of mankind do not seek God chiefly by the exercise of their intellect. Man is so constituted that the most important part of his nature—that part which has most to do with regulating his conduct, and supplying him with motives—is not the intellect but the heart, not the reasoning faculty but the affections.

This is especially so in regard to men's relations with each other, the ties they form, the sort of home they make for themselves. Intellect and calculation have their due place, but the affections—the likes and dislikes of our inmost selves—for the most part have entire sway over us, and make us to be what we are, and to do what we do. According to our likes and dislikes we form friendships, enter into the holy estate of marriage, make our homes happy or miserable. Our real relation to each other is not one merely of buying and selling, service and wages, nor even is it due to the accident of blood relationship; but it is one based more or less on love or hatred, on liking or disliking the persons with whom we come in contact. Moreover, we know people generally in proportion as we love them, and are ignorant of their true nature in proportion as we dislike them. Loving or liking draws people together, disliking or hating

drives them asunder, so that without love or liking mutual knowledge is almost impossible. We do hear it said sometimes, "The more I know of such a person, the less I like him." But this is only half the truth; the dislike is really a hindrance to our knowledge of the only loveable part of the man. And I believe that if we knew each other through and through, as God knows us all, we should love each other a great deal more. And if we began with more love, we should much sooner find out what is love-worthy in those for whom we had no liking.

Now this principle of affection in man is the strongest as well as the most common tie between us and God. We, as it were, seek God, and God seeks us through our *love*. Even the man of science, the theologian, or the philosopher, can only very dimly perceive God, if his intellect be the only part of his nature at work in the search after Him. Nay, all these owe their real discovery of God to a secret sympathy with the principle of love which, in their several spheres of enquiry, they discover to be at work in the world. The scientific man, though absorbed at times in wonder at God's skill, yet is met at every turn by indications of a kind and loving purpose in the mind of the Creator, which brings him at once into the presence of God with a glow of warmest adoration, such as no mere marvels of cold skill could have awakened.

The theologian, too, meets—but, alas! less frequently in his studies than the man of science—with

marks of God's tender sympathy with man, which awaken within him feelings of religious delight far more intense than any theological scheme could have inspired. And the philosopher finds his marble statue of a God now and then lighted up with a glow of human emotion, or moved with pulses of a living love. If he be drawn to God, in spite of all his cold and passionless meditations, it is because some token of God's own love has for a moment diverted him from the barren metaphysics over which he pores.

None of us can find God truly without this sentiment of affection. It is a sort of magnetism which we cannot explain, but the effects of which we can clearly see. We are drawn to God only by the love which we have in our hearts. We cannot rightly understand Him through philosophy, theology, or even science, though each of these may teach us something, and science more than philosophy and theology put together, yet all fall short of bringing us as near to God as He is to us. Like the telegraphic message, which cannot pass if the magnetic current be stopped, or the wire be sundered, our intercourse with God can only take place through the heart by means of the love which unites us to Himself. If our hearts are cold and dead, we have no divine magnetism for our communication; and if our love be diverted altogether to another channel—either confined to ourselves, or directed to some object on earth which absorbs it all—there will be no love

for God, no power of communicating with Him at all.

Now the text bids us to "seek the Lord while He may be found, and to call upon Him while He is near." This, I am sure, does not mean that God is changeable towards us—that He comes and goes with caprice, sometimes willing and sometimes unwilling to be found of us. Nor does it mean that we had better seek Him now, while life shall last, because we shall never have any chance after death if we don't seek Him before. These interpretations are all, to my mind, terribly untrue, and, if believed, would only make men seek the Lord for what they could get; they would only encourage baseness of fear and baseness of desire. They teach us only to call upon the Lord, for fear of what He may do to us if we seek Him not. They degrade God into a Being whose vanity and love of adulation are only greater than His caprice, and whose ill-temper and petulance only less than His selfishness. That is not God; that is a half-man, half-devil, whom it would degrade us to seek, and lower our humanity to call upon.

No; the invitation to "seek the Lord while He may be found," and "to call upon Him while He is near," is made to us here on earth without any possible reference to a future life, the conditions of which we know nothing about.

God is always to be found, God is always near, but our hearts are not always capable of seeking Him. We cannot at all times sincerely call upon Him.

There are chances, so to speak, which come to us, and which, if we lose, do not return. The losses consequent on such neglect need not be hopeless or final, but they are *losses*, and losses which are bitter and painful. There is such a thing as losing God in this life, even while God has never once lost us, and there is such a thing as not being able to call upon Him, even though He be ever near.

If it be true, as I said, that we can only truly find God through our love—that no matter how much God loves us, we cannot come near to Him, so as to *find Him*, unless we truly love Him, then surely there is danger of our not finding Him, and of all the bitterness and darkness which that dread loss involves. We cannot find God without love, therefore we cannot find Him if we are wholly selfish. Near as He may be to us, close knocking at our hearts' doors, encompassing us around on every side with the shelter and support of His everlasting arms, yet we shall never get the smallest comfort or help out of His nearness unless we are seeking Him for ourselves, unless our own hearts are going out to meet Him. For all practical purposes, we may be said to have no God,—to be without God in the world,—unless there be love on both sides, on our side as well as on His.

So we must, for one thing, avoid selfishness—living only to gain our own happiness, to seek our own comfort. Not that this is wicked in itself. It is only animal, instead of human; it is only earthly, instead of divine. Devotion to oneself merely means

the absence of love. We may kill all love by being selfish. We may grow up so selfish as that love shall never be born within us. Perhaps this is more than I ought to say; but, at all events, the danger is very great, that selfishness should so master us as to leave the one spark of love smothered over and choked in the dust, with no power to rise into flame, or to warm our souls any more.

“Seek the Lord while He may be found” means, while you have any love in you exercise it, cherish it, make the most of it, feed it by sight of good things, and by imitation of good deeds. And ask of God to enter into your hearts by that open door. Love your husband, your wife, your children, your servant, your master, your brothers and sisters, your neighbours and tradesmen, as well as your friends, and consider yourself as sent into the world for the one great purpose of showing kindness and being good to others. And seek in this way to find out what God is. Then God will be found of you, and He will show you that He Himself is *Love*; that your love is a reflection of His own; that the better and less selfish and more loving you are, the more you shall know of Him, the nearer you shall be drawn towards Him. If you look only into your theological books, you will see gods of all forms, some hideous, some grotesque, some horrifying, and some contemptible. All of them are false pictures.

You may look long, and in vain, into many metaphysical works. Whatever noble conceptions of God

may be derived from pure metaphysics—and these must be largely admitted—yet there are comparatively few persons who have the power to draw these conceptions; fewer still who have the insight to appreciate them.

You may look with the man of science at the glorious world of Nature around us, but now and then the bright vision is overclouded with awful threatenings, catastrophes ruthless and murderous, desires never fulfilled, sufferings never assuaged, hopes ever crushed; and even, when things are not menacing, when the world is sleeping peacefully after one of its most terrible outbursts of storm and flame, the mere looker-on at Nature is chilled by the awful stillness, and silence, and changeless unconcern. The stars pity not woman's tears, nor does the sun stay in its mighty course to help one poor benighted traveller. The ravening sea heeds no mother's yearning cry for her sailor-boy, and the pestilence comes sweeping round its awful scythe, hurrying the bride, or bridegroom, or firstborn child into the yawning graves. God is not to be found *there* as man wants Him. God is only to be found of us as the Source, Fountain, and Stream of Love. Love first towards us, then love from us to fellow-men, and, at last, love from all to God. We shall see God in all His loveliness, and without shade or frown, when we have hearts stripped of their selfishness, and inspired only by love.

Still, we must not forget that, though this is *essen-*

tial to our finding of God, yet there is one thing more no less essential—we must *seek Him*. We must not rest content, even the most loving of us, with the mere exercise of our love to each other, for this would be to leave the great God out of His truest home—to banish Him from the temple where He most loves to dwell. We must, in loving others, be also seeking to find Him; in serving and making others blest, we must be calling on Him to know what His blessing means. It were a poor ungrateful heart which, after refreshing itself at a banquet, should never return thanks to the bounteous host who had supplied its necessities so richly. So for those whose hearts are already full of love, whose life is made up of anxious thought for others, and whose own joy is all centred in the love of dear ones around them, it would be a poor and mean requital to take no notice of Him whose bounty had filled them with affection, and given them so large a measure of human love in return.

To miss such an opportunity as theirs of seeking the Lord were surely a greater sin than folly. To be content only with the love of a man or woman who will die, and with the love of children who may be taken away to form stronger attachments in a new home, and not to seek after God, whose love is never to be broken—never to be for one moment lost—is surely a fatal blindness, unworthy of human foresight. But to be so wrapt up in human loves and human joys as to forget the Great Source and Giver of all

this unutterable felicity, is a sin which can only be punished by the bitterest self-reproach, and a loss which God Himself cannot restore. Love all you can, and as much as you can; but in all your love, given and received, "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near."

Moreover, let us "seek the Lord" in overflowing gratitude for the bright promise of universal love which He has written on the hearts of men. We shall surely gather something of the Heavenly Father's own spirit if we yield ourselves graciously to wide and generous hopes for the perfect well-doing and well-being of all mankind. The more glad we suffer ourselves to be in anticipation of this glorious fruition, the stronger will be our conviction that our hopes are well grounded, and that God's good purpose is being daily wrought out.

Our hands, too, will grow more willing to help it on, as our eyes become more open to the tokens of God's work around and within us all. And as we see the circle of His love spreading wider and wider beneath our gaze, we shall be led on to breathe forth our grateful adoration in words like these: "We thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast *not* hid these things from the wise and prudent, even while revealing them unto babes; we thank Thee that all souls, rich or poor in wisdom and knowledge, have all alike heard Thy voice calling them up to Thine own heavenly life, 'My son, give me thine heart.' For when Thou sayest, Seek ye my face, Thy face, Lord, will we seek."

APPENDIX TO PART V.

A, *Pages* 92 and 93.

To guard against misunderstanding, I wish emphatically to repudiate the inference which might charge me with denying that man, as an intelligent being, is immortal by the constitution of his nature. But I believe that Love is the most manifestly Divine part of our nature, and therefore the best token we possess that our life is immortal. I also believe that the gifts of Reason and of Conscience may remain almost wholly undeveloped in some human beings, but that Love never is so, even in the most depraved and ignorant. In my belief, then, Love is the most evidently universal of all the higher properties of human nature, and because it is universal, independent of a quickened intellect and of an awakened conscience, it seems to furnish the broadest and strongest basis of our hopes of immortality.

Like all that belongs to us, it is found in almost every degree of development; and men differ as much in their love as they do in other gifts and acquirements. In the lives of some, love is a light shining more and more unto perfect day—in others it

is but a spark, scarcely visible, feeble, and all but quenched. But every man possesses love in some degree, and this is why I prefer it as a basis of our hopes of immortality to those noble faculties of man's intellect which are perhaps not universal.. Love, too, is the highest function of the human being, and as I have shewn in my sermon, it gives its value to the other faculties of our nature by controlling their action; love consecrates and elevates all the rest. It is the unquestioned Sovereign of the Divine Kingdom in man.

B, *Page* 103.

"All of them are false pictures." By this hasty expression I intended only to speak of those pictures of God commonly drawn in accordance with the traditional theology.

THE
"SLING AND THE STONE."

VOL. III.

PART VI.—JUNE, 1868.

WHO ARE BRETHREN ?

AND

THE REWARD OF HUMILITY.

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 30TH JUNE, 1867.

*“We know that we have passed from death unto life,
because we love the brethren. He that loveth not
his brother abideth in death.”*

1 JOHN iii. 14.

It is just possible that by the words “the brethren,” the apostle meant only the disciples of Christ, the members of the Christian Church. But whether he limited the term in this way or not, we as Christians must not and dare not do so. We must consider all men alike—whether they are members of the Church or not—whether they are disciples of Christ or not—as our brethren, to be treated as brethren, to be loved as brethren. The old Jewish law commanded men

to love only their neighbour, and to hate their enemy, and so when the lawyer was told by Christ that if he loved God, and loved his neighbour as himself, he should enter into life, he thought he could make things easier by limiting the term neighbour to those of his own creed. He then asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?" to which Jesus replied by telling him the beautiful story of the Good Samaritan, in order to teach him that all men were neighbours one of another, whenever they fell in each other's way, no matter what their differences might be in creed and religion. And, moreover, He teaches, by this story, that the most acceptable thing in the sight of God is to show neighbourly and brotherly kindness.

We may, therefore, at once dismiss from our minds all idea that we are to love only professing Christians, or to consider as brethren only those who are disciples of Christ. Indeed, it is a sad proof of our unlikeness to Christ that such an introduction to a sermon as this should have been at all necessary. It is a lamentable fact that the majority of Christians, while admitting that they ought to love each other as brethren, yet agree not to love and not to treat as brethren those who are not Christians. They will have no dealings with them, they discourage them in trade, they persecute them whenever they have a chance, and at all events they will have nothing to do with them, nothing to say to them. It is thought quite disreputable to treat as a brother one who is a Deist or professed Atheist, and practically the Christians

have drawn a line around themselves, shutting in the brethren, and shutting out the rest of the world, as if the rest were not children of God as well as themselves.

Society may be right in trying to discourage false opinions, and to place its ban over a class of ignorant demagogues, who would, if they could, subvert all order and right, simply to exalt and aggrandise themselves. But society, nevertheless, does not go to work to correct and reform the outcasts of the community in a Christian manner. No, not in any way that even pretends to be Christian. It takes its own worldly way instead. Let it do so if it be the best. But it does not take a Christian method; and, therefore, society should not assume religious and sanctimonious airs while acting from selfish motives in a most un-Christ-like way.

To treat with contempt and scorn, or with a cold neglect scarcely less irritating and contemptuous, the outcasts of our people, is the worst way to go to work to reform them. They need gentle handling, respectful persuasion, and candid attention from us, in order to let the light dawn on their ignorance, and to penetrate the hard crusts of prejudice which a sense of injury tends still further to petrify. They need the tokens of a brotherly love on our part, to kindle in them a proper affection for the classes above them, whom they falsely accuse of causing all their wrongs. If they get no love, no pity, no respect, no persuasion, their ignorance must grow

worse, their prejudices must grow thicker, and their hearts grow harder and colder from day to day.

But, after all, if our Christian principles are to be of any use, we must know what they are, and apply them. It seems to me the very essence of Christianity that all men should regard each other as brethren, because they are all children of one Father in heaven, and it is the truth or falsehood of this principle which we ought at once to ascertain, and then regularly and systematically act upon our conviction. If some of us be children of God—say, *e.g.*, the Christians,—and others be children of — what shall I say? — the devil, then war, open and deadly, must ever subsist on earth between these two families. And I see no reason why children of God should be more tolerant of the children of the devil than of snakes, bears, and wolves. It is the height of absurdity and inconsistency to hold the doctrine of the fatherhood of God and the fatherhood of the devil, and yet to keep up no outward sign of the awful difference. The truth is, that no one really believes anything so hideous, as that some men, however debased, are the children of a devil. We practically admit that all are the children of God, and anything like open warfare between men on such a ground as difference of spiritual parentage would not be thought of. Yet, if the universal Fatherhood of God over all be the *truth*, why are we not consistent with our secret conviction, in treating all men as brethren? We profess a faith in a common Father, while we

actually resist the family claims which some of our brethren justly make on our love and respect.

Now, it is not easy to account for this inconsistency, except on the ground that we do not actually know what our Christian principles profess to be; and, therefore, we do not apply them practically. We have forgotten, indeed, that God is the Father, both of men whom we reverence and of men whom we despise—of men who are manifest blessings, and of others who are the pests of civilisation. According to our creed, and the whole teaching of Jesus Christ, our acknowledged Master, the worst and the best are alike God's dear children, though, of course, the bad do not deserve the privileges which they disregard, and the good get more than they deserve. But according to our practice, we either don't know this, or have quite forgotten it, because we do not, as a rule, behave in a brotherly way to bad people, or outcasts, or atheists. Even with the many helps to act brotherly which surround the life of a clergyman, he is still hampered by his own instincts to encourage the good, and, as he calls it, to discourage the bad. If the woman with her illegitimate babe, whom he frowns upon, and will not associate with as pleasantly as with his other parishioners, were his own sister, how differently would he treat her! How much more ready to screen her from disgrace, than to join in the just but severe condemnation of scandal-loving neighbours. If the man who writes ribald atheism, or stirs up sedition by disloyal and rebellious speeches,

were own brother to the clergyman or the squire (which has been the case in years gone by), how very differently the poor misguided man would be spoken of; how much more respectfully would he be treated! What pains would be taken to reform him! Now, this shows that the universal brotherhood, of which we make our Christian boast, is not truly and really believed in. That bad woman and that dangerous man are not believed to be sister and brother to the good and respectable. And so long as this relationship between us all is not *realised*, so long will our conduct remain unbrotherly.

The excuses we make, too, are so plausible, and so gratifying to our own self-esteem. We ask ourselves, "How can we punish and discourage evil if not in this way?" and "How will others be deterred from an evil course, except by seeing the trouble into which people fall when they outrage the laws of public decency? We must show by our conduct, both to the guilty party and to the observers, that such and such thoughts and deeds are wrong. We won't help such people, we will have nothing to do with them."

I myself see the force of this excuse, and have sometimes, but not often, acted upon it, much against the dictates of a feeling which lies at the bottom of my heart, and which no sophistry can quite drown. Evil should be discouraged, certainly. But a deeper, truer instinct says, "If you leave the sinner discouraged, solitary, friendless, under a constant sense

of shame, you destroy that sinner's chance of amendment; you drive him deeper into the miry abysses of his own sinfulness; you end at last by making him shameless and defiant." And if his great sin against society be in his false principles, and political disturbance, an inward voice says, "Treat him as a brother, and you may bring him to a better mind—may even lead him to be a help and stay to the State which he defies, and an ornament to the faith which he ridicules. But treat him as an enemy or an outcast, and he will embrace his errors with tenfold obstinacy, and will add revenge for ill-usage to his thirst for unlawful power."

A noted traveller in Ceylon tells us that sometimes out of a herd of elephants is driven one who can get no other elephant to feed him, or speak to him, or play with him, or to mate with him. That this elephant tries to disturb the harmony of the herd, and, in consequence, is driven out from among them, and compelled to roam all his life alone, dreary, passionately savage. The natives call these solitary elephants "rogues," and they dread more than anything an encounter with one of them. For while the ordinary elephants are generally mild and gentle towards human beings, and will rather run away than show fight, the rogue elephant attacks them ferociously, and seems to live for the one pleasure of destroying lives which are happier than his own. A rogue elephant will watch for hours, and even days, by a native track, for the sole purpose of catching and

trampling to death some poor man whom the elephant never saw in his life. Rage and despair, solitude and disgrace, fill the poor elephant's breast, and turn one of the noblest and most benevolent of animals into an incarnate fiend.

Now, these elephants should surely teach us some lesson with regard to the wickedest or outcast people in our land. Their condition of disgrace and infamy only adds to their dangerous character, and makes all their faults tenfold worse than before.

The deeper instinct of brotherly love of which I spoke is a feeling eminently human; and, therefore, as we believe, and as we are taught by Christ, eminently divine. If we love them that love us, what reward have we? Do not even the publicans and sinners the same? But if we love them which hate us, and do good to those who do us wrong, then, surely, we show that we are children of our Father in heaven. I believe, too, we are spoiling our tenderest feelings by making a sort of compromise with them. We are all quite sure that we would give bread to any hungry body, however bad and brutalised he may be. We would give him shelter, or money, or help in some way, if he could not get it elsewhere in lawful manner; but one thing we would not and could not do,—we could not treat him as a brother, and feel true brotherly love and pity for him. So we salve over our consciences by doing the outside part of brotherly kindness, while the essence of it is nowhere. We are deterred, too, by

a not ignoble desire to shelter ourselves from sharing his disgrace. We do not want to be mixed up with such and such characters, lest people should think we sympathised with them, and shared also their bad opinions. Of course we must defend our own reputation. This is a duty we owe, not only to ourselves but to our children and friends, and to the position in life we may each occupy. But why not do this securely, and yet keep the law of brotherly love to the degraded and outcast? Can it not be done? Cannot God's law of self-defence be observed without breaking His higher law of love? Are no efforts available to reconcile our duty to one class in society with our duty to another? Perhaps this has not been tried as it should be tried. And after all, we may find society become the stronger, better, purer, and more honest for the brotherly kindness we show to those who are its avowed enemies.

I am sorry I cannot speak with more definiteness than this, but I shall have done good if I have stirred up your thoughts, and led you to think over the great question for yourselves. We cannot be far wrong if we take brotherly love as the ruling principle of our lives. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." .

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 1ST SEPTEMBER, 1867.

*“ Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and
he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”*

LUKE xviii. 14.

AMONG the remarkable changes which are coming over the spirit of this age, perhaps the most remarkable is the change of feeling in our hearts towards our fellow-men.

From the foundation of the Jewish Church in the person of Abraham, the churches of the world have been fostering in the hearts of all members a sense of superiority, which perhaps reached its height in the days of our Lord, and has ever since been called by the name of Pharisaism, after the sect of the Pharisees,

in whom this sense of superiority and pride of exclusiveness culminated.

The words and deeds in which Pharisaism may express itself vary, of course, with the peculiarities of each particular church or sect; but the spirit is ever the same, and finds a too ready utterance in the spoken or unspoken ejaculation, "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are."

It was John the Baptist and Jesus Christ who first denounced the ungodliness, because they felt the unbrotherliness of this sense of superiority, and both of them left sufficiently strong protests against the Pharisaism of their day to have prevented its recurrence among the members of the Christian Church.

But human nature, ever more ready to be guided by its priests than by its prophets and moralists, exchanged the sentiments of humanity which Jesus had taught them for the dogmas of a hard creed, and the selfish aims of a privileged Church. The doctrine of salvation in the Church only, and damnation out of it, soon bore the inevitable fruits of self-complacency and spiritual pride, which made the members of the Church more cruel to outsiders, the more assured they were of their own safety. To be thus saved, as they thought, instinctively became meritorious, and while they took pride in their own privileges, they began to despise, and to be even angry with those who could not, or would not, become members of their Church.

Passing over the centuries of a persecution which

was only the logical result of the dogma of exclusive salvation, we find in this last century the same spirit as active as ever, although it is now restrained from any fierce outbreak, and from deeds of blood, by the enlarged humanity of the temporal governments. For centuries past, the members of each Church and Sect in Christendom have felt, and have even been trained up to feel, the superiority of their own Church or Sect over every other, and to think the better of themselves, in proportion as they were more constant in their obedience to their Church's rules. The Catholic has thanked God that he was not a Protestant, the Anglican that he was not a Dissenter, the Dissenter that he was not a Churchman; and so on all through the long list of hundreds of Sects, each trying to hold its head above the others. But, bad as this has been, it is scarcely so mischievous as that unspoken sense of superiority which the respectable of all creeds have felt over the outcasts of their time. We used to say that India was the land of caste, where class distinction interfered at every turn with the welfare of communities and the progress of mankind; but in no country in the world is the distinction between the respectable and the disgraced classes kept up more severely than in England. The very air we breathe, and the very language of our countenances in our streets, our markets, and our churches, is, "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are." Even the really extortionate, such, *e.g.*, as the rich manufacturers who adulterate and fraudulently

measure out their goods, and the unjust, who, by means of systematic selfishness, live the lives of robbers, but who steal what is of infinitely greater value than treasure—the happiness of those dependent on them—even these, I say, keep up a pretence and semblance of righteousness; and so long as their evil practices are undetected, they too join in the thanksgiving of the Pharisee. We have drawn a line between wickedness that may be done shamelessly and wickedness which is not respectable, and as long as we keep on the safe side of this line, we may live as unrighteously, ungodly, and unsoberly as we like, and thank God on the top of it that we are not as other men are.

Sometimes the religious pride has merged into the worldly pride. Sometimes the worldly pride has been succeeded by the religious. . But most often the two go together, and the greatest Pharisee is the man who is proud of his social position and of his religion at the same time.

Now, as I said at the beginning, a change is coming over the spirit of the age, in which this pride of religion and pride of respectability is being cast out to make room for sentiments more humane and more godly. The new spirit is closely allied in many instances with a devout scepticism, which refuses to accept as true without enquiry the teachings and traditions of the past. This scepticism challenges the proofs of those vast pretensions which each Church and Sect in turn makes regarding its authority over men's minds and its power of saving

their souls; and the first result of such challenge is to discover the baselessness and impotence of the Church's claims. It is at once discovered that God could not and would not have left men to run such awful hazard of an endless future upon the intricate and impossible assumptions of so many conflicting opinions. The mere fact that contradictory Churches are all clamouring and touting for souls, and taking God's Holy Name in vain in order to terrify men into obedience, is enough to throw discredit upon the pretensions of them all; and to lead at once to the earlier question, "What is God's common relation to mankind?" The Churches have put themselves out of court by their mutual condemnation, and we will not listen to them; we must question the more truthful witnesses of human instinct, and study the facts revealed by the progress of mankind; and from these we instantly gather that God is no respecter of persons; that He does not give a charter of monopoly to any corporation of priests for their traffic in human souls; and that He does not measure men and women by the fallacious standard of our social rules.

We see that God by the greatness of His own heart is incapable of partiality, and by the deep wisdom of His mind is unwilling to judge by the outward appearance. To Him all souls must be equally dear; all must be His own children, because they are men—and all of them He Himself must judge according to the strictest and most impartial justice; measuring the good and evil of all lives by

the powers, opportunities, and temptations, which fall to each man's lot.

Hence the sceptic is led at once to renounce Phari-saism in all and every one of its forms. He cannot pride himself on his membership with any particular Church, for he knows that had he been born in China, he would have been a Buddhist; or in Utah, he would have been a Mormon; or in the heart of Africa, a debased idolater and cannibal. His religious privileges, such as they are, are no more just causes of pride than the climate under which he lives, or the scènery and landscape which encircle his home. He cannot pride himself on any superior virtue, because he has no means whatever of judging how virtuous or how vicious he himself is—still less, how virtuous or vicious are any of his neighbours. He may be indeed among the most respectable, and his goodness may rise into a nobility which good men will admire and praise; but he knows in his deepest heart that he has many weaknesses, and can never say more for himself than what St. Paul said, "By the grace of God I am what I am." He sees indeed the marvellous gulf between his own life and that of the so-called sinners around him; but is he not a sinner too as much as they, if in any single instance he has committed an equally guilty resistance of his own will against the dictates of conscience? He still calls evil, evil, and good, good. The actions of outcast men are still to him awful crimes against the Righteous Law of God; but

he wisely separates the sin from the sinner, so as to own frankly that he cannot judge his brother, and that the Father, who seeth not as man seeth, is alone able to measure the guilt of even the worst crime which can be committed.

This most wise, reasonable, and just conviction, then, helps a man to think humbly of himself, even when all men speak well of him. It is not a sentimental delusion, or an affectation of modesty, but simply the perception of a fact unknown before. While we thought ourselves any better than others, we were simply ignorant of what constitutes the real difference between one man and another. Now that we know that this difference lies not in outward acts, but in many things and circumstances known only to God, and seen only by God, we at once forbear to exalt ourselves, and we are landed at once upon the highly probable, if not certain conclusion, that we are all equal before Him—that the worst man is the worst from no extra fault of his own, and that the best man is the best from no excess of virtue ; but simply that he is further on the glorious road to God's image than his fellow sinners, who will all of them, and the worst of them, be by and by as good as he, and will travel onward for ever in his steps, God's hand being over all, and His loving smile enticing them upwards for ever.

The promise in my text, made to those who perceive and own their common level with all fellow-sinners, is one infinitely higher than is generally

understood. The stock interpretation is, that the people who set themselves up above others shall one day be put down, while those who are modest and humble shall be raised above their fellows. Now this is not what the humble man wants, nor is it true in fact; for the most exalted people are often those who have pushed and elbowed their way by their impudence; and it is an old Bible proverb, "If thou doest well to thyself, all men will speak of thee." The Pharisees generally keep the uppermost seats till the very end, while the modest and sorrowful publican meets with contempt and worldly misfortune till the grave rescues him from the scornful rebuke of the proud.

But Christ's promise is a spiritual and divine truth—"He that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." The natural result of self-exaltation is to produce abasement and disappointment whenever the equality of men shall be established. This promise is in close accordance with the parable of the prodigal son. The eldest son was angry and would not go in to the banquet, because he felt himself disgraced when the father rejoiced over the returned prodigal. He was abased, not by losing one of his former privileges, but by the vexation arising out of his own pride and exclusiveness. And so will all those be abased who set themselves up above others; the time will come when, in the purposes of God, all men shall be welcomed as His dear children into one

common and eternal home; and those who cherish to the last an idea of their own peculiar safety or peculiar goodness, will be, and must be, vexed and ashamed to see their fellow-sinners, whom they now despise, going into the kingdom before themselves.

We cannot cherish any falsehood without it stinging us at the last; and if it be false that we are better than others, and we still cling to the delusion, we shall be one day stung with the discovery that we are not dearer to God than anybody else.

And, on the other hand, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Not in this life, not in worldly honour, not in human praise, but in the deep calm of our own spirits, we shall be exalted; raised above petty jealousies, meannesses, revenge, and rivalries; raised above dark and despairing thoughts; raised far above all selfish struggles for personal salvation, and led to think only of conquering sin; raised even in our own self-respect, because we shall know that God loves us for our capabilities rather than for our merits, and pardons freely our demerits for the sake of our capabilities. If we do but take a humble place at His mercy seat, wisely reckoning our own faults to be as bad in us as other men's faults are in them, we shall soon be exalted into brotherly sentiments, which must bear fruit in greater kindness and justice to each other, and in the delightful efforts to help the weak and to strengthen the tempted, which was the special glory of the life of Christ. We shall be exalted too in the unspeakable joy of beholding God

as the Father of one family, whose life, progress and peace are bound up in Himself—as the Father of children whose infancy and waywardness, and youthful follies, are being watched, controlled, and gathered up by Him, and twisted into the strands which will draw all men at last into His bosom.

THE
"SLING AND THE STONE."

VOL. III.

PART VII.—JULY, 1868.

THE USELESSNESS OF MIRACLES,

AND

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS.

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 19TH JANUARY, 1868.

“ This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory ; and His disciples believed on Him.”

JOHN ii. 11.

I HAVE taken this verse as my text in connection with the Second Lesson, as well as the Gospel for the day, which furnishes instances of miracles said to have been wrought by Jesus of Nazareth.

It is not my intention to enter deeply into the criticism of these narratives, but to base upon them some important enquiries which concern us all to-day.

I wish to ask, in a spirit of entire reverence, what benefit we can derive from these narratives of miracle and supernatural display?

This question is deeply connected with our very religion, with our trust in God, and with our right notions of His dealings with mankind.

But before any other question can be properly raised respecting them, we must first enquire whether the narratives be strictly true; for surely no one would insist much upon their moral or spiritual value if they should be false.

Now for answer to this question, I frankly admit that I cannot discover any satisfactory evidence that they are not fictitious. They may be true, or they may not. The utmost we can attain to is to say we believe them, or we do not believe them.

The time has gone by for asserting that they must be true because they are found in the Bible. We require evidence of a totally different character to that which satisfied the past ages of the Church. We do not even know who wrote the Gospels. We have therefore no evidence as to whether the writers possessed sufficient proof of what they recorded, or even whether their minds were properly qualified to weigh such evidence as might come before them.

This of itself would lead us to hesitate before accepting them, even if all the New Testament writers agreed with each other in every particular which they record. But the difficulty is greatly increased when, on comparing the Gospels together, we find not merely discrepancies in the detailed accounts of the same events, but also absolute and direct contradictions,

which prove that the two conflicting accounts cannot be both of them true. As instances of such contradiction, we may mention the accounts of the history of Jesus till the age of twelve years, as recorded by Matthew and Luke. In Matthew Jesus is represented as being in Egypt at the very time when Luke affirms that He is at Nazareth, and had never left the boundaries of Judæa and Galilee.

Another instance is the difference in the accounts of the resurrection and ascension.

Another instance occurs in relation to this very story of the marriage in Cana of Galilee. At the time when John's Gospel affirms Jesus to be turning water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee,—viz., five days after His baptism,—the Gospel of Matthew affirms Him to be in the wilderness of Judæa, alone and fasting. The first miracle, according to John, is the marriage in Cana of Galilee; in the other gospels the first miracle is the casting out of devils. We read also of Jesus absolutely giving power and authority to His disciples to heal the sick and raise the dead; but no instance is recorded of His disciples ever having had such power, or, if they had it, of ever having exercised it, in obedience to their Master's command, during His lifetime. The whole question of evidence for the truth of the narratives is so beset with difficulties and contradictions that, as I said at first, it is now absolutely impossible for us to affirm that the miracles narrated in the Gospels ever took place at all. If we cannot say

they are certainly false, neither can we affirm that they are certainly true.

But now, to come to the main point of our enquiry, let us assume that the miracles did take place ; and let us ask what benefit do we gain from them ? And to answer this we must again go back to the time at which they were supposed to be enacted, and ask, what good did the miracles do to the people of our Lord's own generation ?

Supposing that the object of the miracles was to produce conviction that Jesus was endowed with superhuman power from God, and that He carried this power forth into action in order to prove the divine authority conferred on Him, did it succeed ? Did the miracles of Jesus carry conviction that He was a superhuman being ? We answer emphatically, No ! They did not convince the great body of His countrymen. His own family ridiculed Him and called Him mad. His neighbours were generally sceptical and indifferent. The people of Gadara, on witnessing one of the most striking of recorded miracles, came out in a body to meet Him, and " besought Him that He would depart out of their coasts." To His own disciples He says, " Ye seek me, not because of the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled." The chief priests, rulers, and scribes, are reported in the three first Gospels not to have believed in His miracles at all. The fourth Gospel, which alone gives an account of the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, describing its effect on the chief priests

and rulers, says that, instead of inspiring them with awe, it only made them instantly take counsel how they might put Him to death. And then the few disciples who are said to have witnessed His wonderful miracles and to have believed in His superhuman power, when the time came for Jesus to be taken before the courts and tried for His life, all ran away and left Him, showing how little they were convinced by His miracles ; while the very multitudes who had cried "Hosanna" and welcomed Him in triumph to Jerusalem, were three days afterwards yelling "Crucify Him, crucify Him."

From all this and more we learn that if that had been the object of the miracles, they were a signal failure. Whatever faith there was in Jesus was certainly not inspired by the sight of these works. We often read, it is true, such words as these, "He manifested forth His glory, and His disciples believed on Him"—"And the multitude marvelled greatly and said that a great prophet hath risen up amongst us, and God hath visited His people,"—passages which the writer of the narrative adds to make us believe that a great effect was produced on the minds of the witnesses by the miracles of Jesus ; but the value of these mere assertions is entirely destroyed by the ample testimony which all the Gospels furnish that His miracles did not save Jesus from the contempt of His family, the distrust of His own followers, and the fearless seizure and crucifixion of Him by the Jewish rulers and the Roman Governor. If that

was the effect of miracles on the people who saw them, and on the very countrymen and contemporaries of Jesus, what, we again ask, can be the value of the recorded miracles to ourselves in this 19th century after Christ?

Assuming the narratives to be true, we find that they do not confer on Jesus any distinction which some other men in His own day were not equally entitled to hold. If the possession of such wonderful powers proved the divinity of Jesus, the possession of them by some of His countrymen also would prove that they too were divine. We read of persons who cast out devils and yet were not even followers of Christ. We read that Jesus himself admitted this when He asked the Pharisees, "By whom do your sons cast out devils?" We find also, that if Jesus healed a diseased woman by the mere act of her touching the hem of His garment, an apostle could heal the sickness of persons at a distance to whom were carried handkerchiefs and aprons from his own body. If Jesus could raise Lazarus from his tomb, so could St. Paul restore Eutychus to life after a fatal fall from the gallery of the synagogue, and St. Peter could raise a Dorcas who had died and been actually laid out for burial.

It is only strictest logic to say that if the divinity of Jesus were proved by His miracles, so the divinity of Paul and Peter were proved by their miracles.

Do, then, the miracles of Jesus in any way confirm and strengthen the truths and precepts which He taught? They did not do so in His own time. Do they in ours? Again we must answer, Certainly not. The truth of His divine teaching, and the excellence of His moral precepts, can only be appreciated by the *reason* and *conscience* of man, and no miracle could add to the truth, no miracle could detract from it. It is equally true that two and two make four, whether the teacher of that proposition work a miracle or not in proof of his divine mission; and, moreover, we should equally believe it and know it to be true, whether or not attested by a miracle, and no miracle whatever could persuade us that two and two make five. And in regard to moral precept, our consciences tell us that "we should do unto others as we would be done by," in a manner so solemn, so imperative, that no miracle performed by a teacher of that precept could add weight to this divine command, and no miracle could make us question that this was our absolute duty in the sight of God. The Book of Deuteronomy gives us this principle in a few most striking and forcible words—xiii. 1—3.

Do, then, the miracles of Jesus make us love Him more for His deeds of love, or reverence Him more for His words of truth and comfort? Again we answer, No. We love Him for His deeds of love, because we have tender human hearts, and we reverence Him for His words of truth, because our reasons are made by

God on purpose to perceive and accept truth whenever and by whomsoever spoken.

I cannot see, then, that even if the miracles really took place, they are of the smallest value to us now. They do not help us to trust in God, nor to love Christ, nor to believe what is true, nor to do what is right.

Nay, I could show, if we had time this morning, that instead of doing us any good they would be a source of great mental and moral perplexity. They would hamper our free trust in God; they would damp our assurance in His impartial love and constant presence; they would take away not a little of the grounds of our faith and hope in Him. To my own mind, they would also unspeakably disparage the character of Jesus, whose simplicity and earnestness, and faith and goodness, draw forth our continual homage; they would raise a barrier between us and our God, and at the same time spoil all the great value of His Son Jesus as our example and our teacher.

If He ever could have given such miraculous powers to His faithful followers, in order that they might lighten the woes and relieve the wants of sorrowful men in a way contrary to God's appointed order, why should He not now hear the cries which rend the heavens, rising from thousands and thousands of starving men, their wives, and little ones? Why not hear the prayers of that self-denying but despairing brotherhood, whose noblest efforts cannot stem the

ocean wave of want and misery and crime ? Why does He not pour on them the miraculous powers which He is said to have given to His disciples? For my part, I think that if Jesus had ever done it at all He would surely do it now.

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 24TH MARCH, 1867.

"And he that was dead came forth bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, and his face was bound about with a napkin."

JOHN xi. 44.

THE story of the death and resurrection of Lazarus, which we have read in our Second Lesson this morning, is too striking and important to be passed over without further enquiry and meditation.

There will always be those who, already accepting as true the many recorded miracles of the Gospel History, find no fresh difficulty in the account of the raising of Lazarus to life after he had been in the grave four days. Once to admit the possibility and probability of miracles, is to get over all subsequent

difficulties of degree in the marvellous. And it seems to me only logical and consistent to accept all the miracles as true, if we believe the records of them to have been the very words of God himself. But this "if" makes all the difference, and lies at the root of all our examination of the New Testament history. We should be simply mad to question the truth of what our Maker had said or written. We only ask, has our Maker said and written these tales, or has He not? And how do you prove that He has written or inspired men to write these records of miracle? I cannot prove it to myself, I wait for you to prove it to me, if you affirm that they are really God's words; it will not do for me to take your word for it, or the Church's word, or any other human and fallible authority for it.

If the Bible said that all of it was God's word, which it does not, this would not prove anything; for if I were to write a book or a sermon, and say in it positively that it was all inspired by God, would you be any more bound to believe it because I said so? Of course not. So if the Bible made any such claim for itself, it would not furnish any ground for believing that these miracles were recorded by God's inspiration. But the Bible does not even make any such claim, and so the Bible is on my side when I say there is no sort of proof that God wrote the accounts of miracles, or inspired any one to write this story of Lazarus' resurrection. I am, therefore, not bound to believe it, as I should be if I were certain that it was God's

own account of it. On the contrary, I have a right to enquire into it, to examine it with a view to test its genuineness, and to compare it with other writings which were composed nearer to the time in which the miracle was said to have taken place. Less and less importance is being attached to miracles. When I was younger, they were considered to be the very basis of Christianity, now men see that what is good and true in Christianity will stand and live whether there have been miracles or not. This is a great point gained, and it is some satisfaction to know that the Archbishop of York admitted this in addressing the working-men at the York Congress.

We can, therefore, fearlessly criticise the account of Lazarus in this Gospel; knowing that whether it be true or false, it cannot affect God's good purpose towards mankind; it cannot release us from any of our high moral obligations, or destroy a single hope of the world to come. Whether it be true or false, the integrity of our Lord's character remains unshaken; for if it be false, it was no fault of His that any professed disciple should have written as His words, words which He never spoke; or should have described as His conduct, deeds which by Him were never done. If it be all a made-up tale, written with a special purpose, not that of recording facts, we shall not cast reproach on our Master's truthfulness, nor think less nobly of His fine human sympathies. We may on the other hand find some relief in the discovery that the story is most improbable, and we

may even gain in courage and hope from disbelieving that any such resurrection ever took place.

Now, I will dwell for a minute or two on the narrative, and shew you what appear to me grounds for discrediting the story.

In the first place, the author of this Gospel manifestly aims at setting forth a totally different Christ to that represented by the three other evangelists. He mixes up philosophical speculations about the logos or eternal word which had come from the Alexandrian schools, and of which Matthew, Mark, and Luke are entirely ignorant. This fourth evangelist wants to magnify the powers of Jesus Christ, and to surpass the accounts of miracles as given in the older Gospels. He records only few miracles, but always gives us the account of their effect on the bystanders, and what they said or were supposed to have said, and this too with the object of proving a certain theory concerning the being and nature of Christ. This evangelist alone gives the story of Lazarus, and in a most emphatic manner declares that the raising of Lazarus to life was the *immediate* cause which led to the apprehension and crucifixion of Jesus. He tells how many leading Pharisees and chief men of the Jews were witnesses of the miracle, and actually visited Lazarus at Bethany several times after his resurrection, and how, in consequence of the increasing confidence of the people in Jesus Christ because of this miracle, the chief priests gathered together in council and contrived his death. According to this Gospel, no event

in our Lord's life was so well known, so well capable of being attested, or had so much to do with His being put to death. Indeed, if this account be true, it is almost as great a miracle as the raising of Lazarus that the Jews who were convinced of Christ's power to raise the dead should have been so senseless as to conspire to kill Him. For one who could raise the dead would surely have power enough to punish His enemies without a chance of their escape. But though all this is so fully stated in John's Gospel, no notice whatever is taken of it by Matthew, Mark, or Luke. There is no allusion to Lazarus at all, no mention of this miracle whatever as the immediate cause of the council of the chief priests ; and according to them, at the feast held in Simon's house at Bethany, Lazarus was not even there, much less an object of eager curiosity to the Jews, as described in John. In John the family at Bethany are important and perhaps rich people, but they are not even named by the other three. They make a feast for Jesus and invite many guests, who come to see the risen Lazarus, when Mary, the sister of Lazarus, anoints the feet of Jesus with a box of spikenard, very precious, and wipes them with the hair of her head. In the other Gospels, the supper is at the house of one Simon, a leper, who could not be received into society by the Jewish custom, and at whose house no respectable person would visit ; and at this feast it is recorded by them that "a woman" came and anointed our Lord's feet with ointment, and the same remarks are made

upon her conduct by the disciples. The first three Gospels and the fourth do not agree, and cannot be forced to agree in this matter; and it is incredible that the older writers should not even have mentioned Lazarus, or recorded a miracle so astounding, had it really taken place.

Besides this, the narrative itself contains sayings ascribed to our Lord which seem most improbable. Because, if He spoke them, they could only have had a spiritual meaning, and that meaning could not apply to the occasion. As for instance, when our Lord says, "I am the resurrection and the life ; He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die," He could only have meant this in a spiritual sense, because believers in Him *do* die physically, though in a spiritual sense it might be said that they never die, as death itself is only a change into another kind of life. But then if our Lord spoke this spiritually and in this spiritual sense, it did not apply to Lazarus's case, who was said to be raised physically ; and the return of Lazarus to human life on earth—to actual eating and drinking, as the next chapter affirms—would only make Lazarus to die *twice* instead of once—for we may be sure that he is not alive on earth now, and also that he has not taken his body, his flesh and blood, away with him into any other world. I argue from this, that these words said to be spoken by Christ, if understood literally, are not true ; if understood spiritually, they did not

apply to the occasion, and therefore were not spoken by Him at all, in the manner stated by this writer.

The next passage which appears highly improbable is that address to God, which Jesus is said to have made at the tomb of Lazarus. The evangelist makes Jesus say, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard me," which is natural and probable ; but the next verse betrays that the writer is not giving us Christ's own words, but is writing with a purpose to make Jesus Christ say that He was what the writer believed Him to be. He makes our Lord say, "And I knew that Thou hearest me always, but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent me." If our Lord said this privately in prayer to God, there was no need to offer any explanation to God why He used these words. And if our Lord said them aloud for the people to hear, they would not have convinced a single unbeliever—at best they could only have Christ's own word for His having been sent by God. I do not believe Jesus Christ ever descended into such petty pretences as are involved in this made-up speech. I could not bear to think of one so open, so candid, so simple, and so childlike towards the Father, as He was, pretending to pray and to give thanks for the sake of producing an effect on the bystanders. No, these words seem to have been written by one who wanted to shew that although Christ prayed and gave thanks to the Father, He was not under any necessity to do so, like other men ; but the way in

which the writer has tried to represent this betrays its own falsehood.

But, now, even supposing it were all strictly true, I ask myself, and I ask you, my friends, whether there is the smallest comfort, or consolation, or hope, to be drawn from the story. It only proves, even if true, that Jesus brought back into earthly life one who had already gone through the dark valley of death, only to die again in later years, to go through all the pain and dread and darkness of that last hour over again—yes, to die twice—to be wrung twice instead of once with the grief of separation, and to inflict twice in the lifetime of those who most loved Lazarus the pangs of a last farewell. Ah! little dreamed they who put together this tale, how bitterly strong is human feeling when ripened by higher knowledge and a nobler faith; how even the love of brothers and sisters would forbid a recall from the grave of any of the beloved dead, if it were only to issue in the repetition of their worst human sorrows. The writer of this tale must have been strangely destitute of natural affection, or of any proper belief in the life to come, if he could think that Christ in raising Lazarus had done him any kindness, or that sisters could be so selfish as to wish to drag back again their dead brother out of his home in heaven.

Not for our best and dearest of friends would we ever breathe a prayer that the dark valley once passed should ever be recrossed. We wish to go to them, not that they should return to us. We love them too

well to wish that God would put them back in the great journey to immortal bliss, and change a new found life of light and freedom for the old and abandoned fetters and darkness of earth. If such a raising of the dead be good for us and them, why does not Jesus give us back the loving friends we have lost? What mockery of the world's wailing it is to have raised but one or two, just to show that He had the power, and yet would not exercise it for those who want it more!

If Lazarus were really raised, it was either a cruelty to him or an injustice to us. And so I honestly and heartily say that I do not believe that our Lord ever did anything so cruel, or that He ever did on earth for His own generation anything that He would not do also for us now, if He had the power and were here to exercise it.

Even supposing that such events were divinely ordered on purpose to manifest or attest His Godhead, what use or comfort can it be to us when He is no longer here, but is, according to the Scriptures, seated at the right hand of God? We cannot get Him to heal our sick, to open the eyes of our blind, to feed our hungry, or to raise our dead; and so the thought that He did all this once for men, in a very short human lifetime, would only fill us with murmurs at our desertion, and distrust at His partiality.

Believe me, my friends, it is not the mere marvellousness of miracles which is the greatest hindrance to our acceptance of them, but it is the terrible thought

that, if true, they place God and Christ further off than before, and leave us kneeling before the shrines of an absent God, scarcely less silent than Baal, or less heartless than Moloch. If they are true, they make us, as I said, feel our estrangement the more, and they cloud our pathway to His presence with a darkness that may be felt.

THE
"SLING AND THE STONE."

VOL. III.

PART VIII.—AUGUST, 1868.

GOD'S THOUGHTS NOT OUR THOUGHTS.

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 27TH JANUARY, 1867.

“ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

ISAIAH lv. 8, 9.

THE value of the former of these two verses depends upon its connection with the latter.

There are two opposite views of God which are met and corrected by these two statements.

It has been the universal custom amongst men to form their image of God out of their own consciousness. The gods whom men have worshipped, have been, for the most part, exalted images of themselves—and according to the moral degradation or moral elevation of different worshippers, the god whom they worshipped has been either evil or good—has been base, sensual, and tyrannical, unjust, covetous,

selfish and revengeful, or has been noble, pure, kind, merciful, long-suffering, forgiving iniquity, self-sacrificing, and uniformly just.

It is manifest that the words "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," is an answer from God to all those who thus form an image of God after their own likeness—though in very different degree, according to the moral standard of different men—that is, God's thoughts and ways must be much more unlike the thoughts and ways of some men than those of others.

But there is another class of thinkers who are found alike amongst the professedly religious and the irreligious, who affirm that God's thoughts and ways are so totally different in kind to the thoughts and ways of men, that men can never gain any true knowledge of the Divine character and dealings; that we cannot possibly judge of the moral aspect of any of His dealings with men; that He is even capable of actions and decrees which in men we should call base and cruel, but which He has a right to do because He is God. That, in fact, we have no business to apply the words *right* and *wrong* to any of His supposed dealings in the same sense in which we use those words in speaking of the dealings of man.

Now I conceive that the second verse of my text is a special answer to these views of God, as the first verse was an answer to the other views. If men are content to hold as final truth that conception of

God's thoughts and ways, which is but a reflection or image of their own, then we may answer, God's thoughts and ways are not your thoughts and ways. If other men say, We cannot pretend to have any notion of what God's goodness and justice and love may be, because they are totally unlike what we mean by the terms goodness, justice, and love among men, then we may answer, Granted that our notion of God's thoughts and ways is very defective and poor, yet, at all events, His thoughts and ways are not lower and meaner than ours, but they infinitely surpass them in glory and excellence. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts higher than our thoughts." And this is a tremendous gain. It gives us some ground to stand upon at all events. If our best and noblest images of God be but poor and wretched caricatures of His Divine beauty, yet still He is above, not below, them. He is more good than our highest thoughts of goodness can conceive, more just in every way, more loving and loveable than the noblest image of God which has been created by man's heart, or the highest example which has been permitted by God to walk this earth in order to reveal His love to men.

If you take these two verses together, and remember that the first statement is only made as an introduction to the second, you will find how very true they are when tested by the facts of our history.

I will call your attention to some thoughts of men about God, prevalent in the days when these words were written, and others of still later times, which have been entirely exploded and corrected by the acquisition of higher knowledge.

First, with regard to God's thoughts and ways in creation. It was supposed that this earth was flat and round like a table, fixed in one immoveable position, about which the sun, moon and stars moved in their regular courses. That this earth was the very centre of all things, and that the great blue dome, which we call the sky, was a solid covering which had windows in it to open and let down the rain, and was pierced with holes to allow the light behind it to shine through; these were the stars. God was supposed to live in a region above that solid firmament, and even Moses is said to have seen the feet of God, as upon a floor of paved work, through the transparent sky. The dead were supposed to go down to a place under the earth, which was dark and dreary, and from which none could ever return.

These are only a few of the thoughts of men about God's creation; and I know of no better illustration of my text than this in the whole history of human ignorance. God might well say to them, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, for as the heaven is higher than the earth, so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts." Still they had something in common with the thoughts of God, for they could calculate by careful observation the passage of the

constellations, and the sun's apparent movements through the heavens. They had at least got hold of a little of God's thoughts of arithmetic and geometry, and perceived the unwearied constancy of God's noble laws. But, by-and-bye, as you know, men found out the truth about the earth being round like a ball, and moving round the sun; about the sky being not solid at all, and about the stars—some being worlds like our own, revolving round our sun, and other stars being themselves enormous suns, at distances too awful to be conceived, and having worlds like ours rolling round them in wonderful order. In time men began to get still more enlarged views of creation, and found that some of the stars were in perpetual revolution round other centres inconceivably distant, and requiring thousands or millions of years to accomplish one single orbit.

In regard to this part of creation, our thoughts are at least something like the thoughts of God, now that we know more. Men have shown by their discoveries that we have minds something like the mind of God, or we never could have found out so many wonderful truths about His works, or have understood so well the thoughts of our own Maker when He spread out the glorious heavens. But for all that the astronomer knows so much, He only knows a mere drop in the ocean of what is yet to be known. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so even now are God's thoughts higher than our thoughts, and His ways still far above out of our sight."

The old notion of giving God an abode above the sky has given place certainly to the idea of a God everywhere present, everywhere sustaining, and ordering, and blessing the creatures which He has made. But we have not yet fathomed this world of thought in which God's nearness to us every one has yet to be discovered. We can only hope it and believe it. Some day we may actually see it and prove it.

The thought of God leaving the dead in darkness and desolation under the earth has given way before the brighter intelligence and deeper love of advanced humanity; and now the hopes of endless life, of the conquest of death by the victory of God's love, which only a few in past ages dared to cherish, have become the common belief of all Christian men. Yet even here, God may well say to us, "My thoughts are higher than your thoughts." Your crude imaginations of a new earth, of old bodies raised to life again, and of another existence like the present, only without suffering, these and such like conceptions are all far poorer than what I, the Creator, have in store for you. "The eye hath not seen, nor the ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for those whom He loves." We hope for much, He will give more. He will do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think—for His ways of gratifying the desires of those whom He has inspired with human love, are higher than our ways, and His thoughts towards us are thoughts of

peace and not of evil, to give us a far better than an expected end.

To turn to another contrast between the thoughts and ways of God, and the thoughts and ways of men. At the time when this part of the book of Isaiah was written, and for centuries after, the thoughts and hopes of the Jew were centred in one who should come as the Messiah of God, reign in Jerusalem as king, subdue all the old enemies of the Israelites, and bring the whole Gentile world under tribute. But God's thoughts were not men's thoughts. He knew the thoughts of the Jews about this Messiah, that they were vain. None of those hopes were realised. It is very unlikely that they ever will be, and the Jews now admit this themselves. But God's thoughts were higher than the thoughts of the ancient Jew. He disappoints the selfish and ambitious statesman that He may bless and embrace the whole world. Instead of a Royal Messiah, He sends a Roman Emperor to crush the nation, to lay waste Jerusalem, to destroy the temple, and to abolish the whole Jewish nationality and worship. But He sends also about the same time a poor peasant of Galilee, a carpenter's son, whose message of world-wide love from the Father in Heaven is worth more to Jew and Gentile, if they will only listen to it, than all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them. Better than any Messiah who should wear a crown and wield the sceptre of David, was this despised Galilean. Greater honour lay in the citizen-

ship of His kingdom of love, and peace, and joy, than in the most splendid days of Solomon's glory. More blessing fell on the Jew, when God robbed him of his idolised temple and city, than his proud covetous heart could ever have desired. But he knew it not. God's thoughts were not his thoughts, they were too high for him then to understand.

One more illustration I will take from the second lesson of this morning's service.

The thoughts of men in our Lord's time, or very soon after, began to turn from this hopeless expectation of the Jew to a still more unreasonable one respecting the return of Jesus Christ. I am quite aware that our Lord is represented as saying things that would encourage His disciples to look for His very speedy return in triumph and glory, and that not even that generation should pass away till they should see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.

I need not waste words in again showing you the error of this belief, and reminding you that the sun has not been darkened, nor the moon turned into blood, nor have the stars withdrawn from their shining; that the sign of the Son of Man has not been seen in Heaven, that He has not sent His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, nor has He been seen coming in the clouds with power and great glory; that not only did none of these things come to pass within that generation which is fixed by the 34th verse, "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall

not pass till all these things be fulfilled ;” but that about fifty-four generations have lived and died since these predictions were said to have been uttered.

There is no alternative beyond this—either that Jesus Christ did not say these words—or that if He said them, He must have been mistaken. I unhesitatingly choose the former of these alternatives—and believe that Jesus Christ never said these words, never intended to foretell anything so irrational, or so calculated to overthrow the moral government of God, as the fulfilment of such a prediction would be.

But many men must have thought this, or the thought would never have got into the New Testament. Men, full of impatience at the wrongs and sufferings of life, and perhaps still more wearied with the conflict with sin which God sends us all to fight out from the cradle to the grave, sought in some such vain hope the sudden and speedy deliverance from all their sorrows and cares.

But God’s thoughts were not their thoughts, nor His ways like their ways. He had better things in store for mankind than such a return of Christ to earth. God would not stultify His own decrees so as to undo in a moment the work which in all the ages past had been growing, and which in all the ages to come, would have yet to grow to perfection. In plain English, God having given to man “to work out his own salvation, because God was working in him both to will and to do His good pleasure,” would not cancel the engagement or take

the burden and responsibility of man's own self-improvement and lay it upon another who should solve all difficulties, settle all disputes, divide all property, and make earth into a great play-room for idle children. God's thoughts for man are indeed far higher than the thoughts of man for himself, and His ways of bringing many sons unto glory is not by carrying them on beds of roses, but by making them tread the weary and hard, yet wholesome, path of suffering and self-sacrifice.

But our thoughts will grow like His thoughts if we long for goodness, if we try to live so as to make others happy; yet even then His thoughts are far higher than ours. Seeing further and knowing more than we, the little creatures of a day, He lays His plans for the good of all on far wider outlines than our poor eyesight can take in. That He means well by us all, even in our bitterest disappointments; that He continues true and faithful to His good purpose, even when our eyes faint with looking upwards, and our souls have waited till hope is dead within us—this we must still believe, for if our own thoughts and hopes can never be fulfilled, it is only because they are put aside to make room for goodness too great for us to conceive, and for bliss which, if we saw too soon, might blind us with its glare.

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 31ST MARCH, 1867.

EVENING, 22ND MARCH, 1868.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

ISALAH lv. 8, 9.

SOME Sundays ago I preached on this text, endeavouring to show that while God's thoughts and ways are very different to the thoughts and ways of men, yet His thoughts and ways are never below, but always infinitely higher than ours. On that occasion I drew illustrations from human thoughts about the earth, sun, and stars, from the Jewish expectations of the Messiah, and from those anticipations of

Christ's coming again to earth which were held by the apostles.

I now wish to speak more particularly of the earthly life of man, as displaying thoughts and ways of God very different to what we should have adopted for ourselves, and very different to what at first we should have expected from a good God. I shall now endeavour to give good reasons for believing that God's thoughts and ways are the best after all, that His purpose with men is much higher than we dreamt of, and that there must needs be a state of things, unspeakably painful and terrible to men, as an essential part of their early discipline.

1st. This present life is very different to what we should have chosen, on account of its *suffering*. I am not now going to speak of *sin*, or of any remorse on account of sin. I wish to keep the two ideas of sin and suffering quite distinct. I speak merely of absolute pain which we have to endure in our bodies, our minds, and our affections, although much pain may be due to our own faults. It is, I believe, certain, beyond all doubt, that every human being suffers pain at some time or other during life, which he could not avoid; and that very many lives are painful from the cradle to the grave. "Man is, indeed, born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward."

Now it avails nothing with some people to be reminded of the joys of life, or of the compensations which in many cases, though not in all, are attached to a condition of suffering. The difficulty lies in the

questions—Why there should be suffering at all? Is it consistent with a God of Love and Almighty Power that there should be pain and sorrow? I must confess that, at first sight, it does seem incredible that a God, who wishes His creatures to be happy, should consign them hopelessly to pain and sorrow—that no escape is possible from some form or degree of suffering. However young and innocent, however old, every one pays this dreadful tax upon his own life; and so sure as he breathes he must one day groan or weep. Because it is inevitable, and not altogether due to our own fault, therefore we may be sure that it is a part of God's own plan with our race; and, at first sight, it makes us question, if not His goodness, at least His regard for men.

And I feel quite sure that in this matter God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways. Had we the making of ourselves, and the appointment of our own destiny, we should take care, above all other things, to exclude pain. We would have no tears flow, no sighs heaved, no aching hearts, nor wearied limbs. Sickness, death, and separation would have no place in an earth formed by man after his own idea of what is comfortable. Supposing that we had the wisdom to devise any plan of life which would exclude pain, we should have shut it out by universal consent. Seeing, then, the very wide difference between our thoughts and God's thoughts in this matter, it becomes a very grave question, Are God's thoughts about human pain

and sorrow lower than our thoughts, or are they higher? We own the difference; but whose plan is the better one, ours or God's? And for answer to this question, it will not do to follow the example of those who think it wrong to reason, and say, "Who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay?" It will not do thus to evade one of the most profound and formidable of all the problems of this age. Better at once to own the truth, and say, "We are hopelessly puzzled by this painful life, and it robs us of all trust in God." Better to say this, shocking as it is, than to pretend to acquiesce in God's plan, and to call it good only because we will not even look at it. ... I think God is now mercifully appealing to our reasons, stimulating our enquiries by His own Holy Spirit, in order that we may arrive at higher truth, in order that we may gain a nobler trust, than we had before, when we lay still in darkness and sleep. He wants us, I believe, to make sure the foundation of our faith and hope; to build it on the rock of reason, instead of building, as we have hitherto done, on the treacherous sand of human authority and tradition.

My answer to this question, then, would be, Yes; God's ways *are* higher than our ways, and His thoughts higher than our thoughts, in this very matter of causing or appointing pain and sorrow in man's lot on earth. Because, first, pain is necessary

to change, decay, and death; and change, decay, and death are, in their proper order, necessary to succession. Succession multiplies infinitely the number of individuals enjoying life. Here God's plan is higher than ours. While we should, as it were, lay plans only for ourselves—for a limited number, not caring for posterity or for individuals unborn, God lays plans for countless millions—for, perhaps, an infinite succession of human beings, each generation of which is to be happier and better for the generation which has gone before. We must, therefore, give place to successors—we must die to give place to them—we must decay to die—we must change in order to decay—we must have pain that we may change.

This is my first and lowest reason for considering that God's plan is a better one than ours. I know that it can easily be answered by saying, "Why does not God produce succession without death, decay, change, and pain?" This I cannot answer; but I do think we might just as well ask, Why does not God make the earth a cube, instead of a sphere? I believe that there are some things God cannot do, because He has rendered it impossible for them to be done—many things, in the foolish imagination of man, God himself cannot do, because they are not wise. God's power is not infinite in the sense of His being able to do any absurd or impossible thing. We must argue from things as they are, or not at all. It will not help us one bit to say, "Why cannot God produce succession on earth

without pain?" Let us say we don't like it, and it disturbs our faith, if we will; but don't let us take up the silliest of all forms of complaint, which would be substituting the suggestions of our confessed ignorance for the actual arrangements of a Providence whose wisdom in other matters we unhesitatingly adore.

My next reason for believing God's plan the best, is also taken from the supposition that pain leads to death. And on this point, I must own that all turns on the certainty of a future life of progress for man. If there be that future life, then death is a transcendent *good*, and all that prepares us for it and leads to it may be looked upon as part of a good plan. Pain and sorrow is part of our very growth towards a higher life, and were we to banish these; and death most of all, as being the worst ground of complaint made by some against God's plan, then we should never be anything but earth-born men. Progress there could never be—birth would become needless, and soon forgotten—and we should have to face each other through eternity in a hum-drum existence, which to men as they are now constituted, would be the greatest conceivable curse.

But there are far higher reasons than these why pain should be. Pain and sorrow generally, and in most cases, do unspeakable good to the moral and spiritual nature of man, and so tend to promote and to elevate human happiness.

Pain generally produces courage, patience, tender-

ness, and sympathy. I will not say it always does, nor that its first effect is to produce these virtues. Sometimes pain and sorrow produce cowardice, frenzy, hardness and cruelty. But it is absolutely certain, that without pain there would be no courage, nothing to brave. Without pain there would be no patience—nothing to bear—without pain there would be no tenderness, for pain arises from sensibility. Without pain there could be no sympathy, for sympathy is really fellow-suffering—one of the most exquisite of human qualities, the power of feeling another's pain. More than half man's nobleness is due to his suffering condition. Viewed, not merely as chastisement for wrong done, but simply as an experience of discomfort, a disturbance of his own plans and of his own natural selfish desires, pain is not only wholesome, but redeeming; not merely a necessary evil, but an indispensable good. And here, perhaps, I shall be met with dozens of instances in which pain has done or shown no possible good—in which it has simply been, or appeared to be, wanton, aimless, profitless woe, as if it had been inflicted by a blind and savage Being, who tortured, for torture's sake.

The loss of the "London" steamer, to which I referred this morning, itself presents examples of both kinds of result from the infliction of pain. The same catastrophe, the same appalling terror, ennobled some and debased others—made some brave, others craven—some generous, others selfish. These

apparent anomalies are to be explained, not by laying the blame of the evil on the presence of pain, but by taking into account the complex nature and various stages of man. What does him good at one stage, is fatal at another—what exasperates him at one stage, subdues and raises him at another. We, none of us, think of objecting to the sun, which is the very source of all life on earth, because under some circumstances, exposure to its rays is certain death. The varied effects of pain must be accounted for by taking also into consideration the different circumstances and conditions of the men who are exposed to it.

But I should be neglecting an important duty, if I failed to point out the extremely uncertain character of our own conclusions as to the harm which may be done by pain. How do we know that a course, apparently awful to our view, and made so by unbearable pain, is not leading surely and inevitably to that glory to which we all hope to come. We cannot tell, but we may well hope that no pain is fruitless for ever; still more that no pain leads to unmitigated and irrecoverable ruin. And if we cannot hope this, we may well hold our tongues and not decide, without better evidence, what our Maker intends by allowing the consequences which seem to us so overwhelmingly horrid.

There is one more intrinsic value in a condition of pain like ours which cannot be overlooked. It makes us restless, and enquiring. All our knowledge

has sprung out of our pain, just as every man amongst us owes his life to-day to the pains of hunger which he felt when an infant. Pain has been man's intellectual, as well as moral school-master. Had it not been for pain and the restless desire to prevent or cure it, there would have been no cultivation of the mind—no discoveries of stored up treasure—no reading of the wonderful books of Nature which are spread out before us. Man's helpless painfulness has been the perpetual stimulator of his mind to knowledge—of his hands to skill—of his social instincts to civilization. And I conclude, from even the little we have said of the effects of pain upon the well-being and progress of mankind, that God was wiser than we in subjecting us to it, and that as time rolls on, we shall be more and more forced to admit that “as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts.”

We may take comfort at least in this, that our thoughts are sometimes like His thoughts, when we, in the devotion of our love to our own children, inflict pain and sorrow upon them for their good—and for their good only. We resent soon enough the interference of weak, indulgent, or inexperienced relatives, who say “Oh don't let the poor child cry—give it what it wants—don't whip it,” etc.; and we know then and there how much more we love our children than any one else can, and how much more true love it requires to brace our courage to give them pain

and sorrow, than to give them joy. And we know, too, that children always love those best, who do not let them have their own way, and who inflict pain upon them for their good. Some day, if not now, we shall feel the same delight in our Father's will, and love Him all the more because of our earthly sorrows. At least He must be as good as we, and if we, being evil, know how to show true kindness to our children, so much more does our Heavenly Father know how to be most kind to us.

THE
"SLING AND THE STONE."

VOL. III.

PART IX.—SEPTEMBER, 1868.

GOD'S THOUGHTS NOT OUR THOUGHTS ON SIN.

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 26TH MAY, 1867.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

ISAIAH lv. 8, 9.

ON two former occasions I have addressed you on these words, endeavouring to show that the wishes of men have been very different to the will of God, as revealed in human experience, and that God's thoughts and ways are proved in the end to be far higher than the thoughts and ways of men. Hitherto I have only spoken of men's early thoughts about the order of the visible universe, of the Jewish expectation of a Messiah, and of the Apostolic expectation of the

return of Jesus Christ in their own age and generation—all these I have shown to be the vain thoughts of men, which God, in His higher wisdom, has mercifully disappointed. In the second sermon you will remember that I spoke on the still deeper subject of the presence of pain in human life, and endeavoured to show that God's appointment of pain was infinitely better for us than that freedom from pain which most of us would have preferred. This morning I am going to ask you to follow me into what seems to me the deepest question of all in connection with the superiority of God's thoughts and ways over the thoughts and ways of men—and that is the question of moral evil or sin.

Sin has been spoken of as the greatest difficulty in the way of believing in a perfectly good and benevolent God. Those who still maintain a belief in everlasting punishments have said to me, "You must first reconcile the goodness of God with the presence of moral evil in the universe at all, before you can affirm that evil will not be everlasting."

Without stopping to give an answer to this objection, I allude to it to show how very great a difficulty it presents to many minds that there should be evil anywhere in God's world—that a God all-good, all-wise, and all-mighty, should have permitted such a thing as sin to mar the happiness of His creation.

There seems to be, indeed, no doubt that our thoughts about sin and our ways of dealing with it are very different to God's thoughts and God's ways.

The best of men—yes, the worst of men too—would have liked a world free from sin. But the whole human world is under its ban, and there liveth none who sinneth not. Our way of dealing with it is to exercise our power in punishing and in forcibly preventing it. God's ways show that he seldom, if ever, forcibly prevents it, and He leaves sin to punish itself—that is, as far as we can see, on earth. But there is not time this morning to say much about God's way of dealing with sin. I shall confine my remarks to the simple subject of the existence of sin in the world, and endeavour to show that, however much we dislike and regret it, God's plan of permitting it and, in a sense, rendering it inevitable at certain stages of our being, is an infinitely higher and better plan—better for us, and better for His glory and honour.

I must, however, very seriously warn my hearers not to misunderstand what I say. I would deliberately wish my tongue to falter and my breath to stop, rather than make anyone think lightly of the wickedness of sin, or undermine, if such a crime were possible, the authority of conscience. My aim, I trust, is always to make people hate evil, and love goodness more and more, and to stir them up to the great battle with selfishness and sensuality, and not to yield, cowardlike, to temptation, or think that it matters very little whether we sin or not. If any of you fail to understand what I am about to say, you cannot, and shall not misunderstand this—that moral

evil is what we live on purpose to put down; that for every wanton sin there is a just and inevitable penalty marking the wrath of our God against it, and falling upon us in order to drive us from its repetition—to make us cease to do evil, and learn to do well.

Now, on what is coming I say, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Did you ever ask yourselves, calmly and thoughtfully, “What is sin?” For upon the answer to this question depends all that we have to say about the goodness of God in allowing it to come into the world. You, perhaps, would first say that such and such acts are *sins*—lying, stealing, cruelty, murder, etc., are sins. And so they are; and for all practical purposes it does very well to think of sins as certain wrong acts—certain acts forbidden by some law within or without us—and, therefore, known to be wrong, wicked, sinful.

But there is one mistake we make—these acts are not sinful in themselves; they are not necessarily sins; they have only come to be so considered by a large portion of mankind. For a savage may lie and steal without any sense of doing wrong; an untaught child of tender years will be cruel even to its own parents, as well as to the flies and animals around it, without any sense of sin; and a madman will commit murder and not feel that he has done wrong, nor, when he comes afterwards to his senses, can he ever be persuaded of guilt. There must be something more than the act itself to make it sinful. There must be a

consciousness at the time of doing wrong, that we are doing wrong, or there must have been consciousness of doing wrong at some earlier point in a downward course, from which all our subsequent ill-conduct may be traced. As when a man goes into evil company with a sense of doing wrong, knowing that he is putting himself into temptation, he sins in that act, and that sense of sin makes him responsible for all the wicked results of bad companionship into which he may afterwards be led. He may, in a state of desperate drunkenness, commit acts of bestiality and violence of which he is not conscious at the time, and which he would never have done when sober. But if he purposely made himself drunk, or did not make sufficient effort to avoid being drunk, he is not only guilty of that act of drunkenness, but responsible for his subsequent conduct. The law punishes him for his acts of violence or indecency. But these were not the man's sin; his sin was in getting drunk—in not keeping sober. I do not consider any act to be sinful unless it be felt as sinful at the time. It may be mischievous to others in the last degree, it may entail a life-long misery on him who has committed it; but if it be not committed with a full sense of doing wrong, it is not sin. The act may be called by a wise Government a criminal act, to be followed by regularly established penalty; but it is not necessarily sin, unless the man did it against his conscience, knowing that he was doing wrong. Sin, then, it appears to me, is not in the act at all, but only in the feeling. Sin only is as it is felt.

What is sin in one man is not necessarily sin in another. What is sin at one time of our lives is not sin at another. What once was sin may cease to be so. What was right once may hereafter become sinful.

Circumstances alter cases, and circumstances alter the moral aspect of certain actions, although the common consent of civilized man condemns certain acts. There is as yet no certain fixed infallible code of good conduct known to us, for the simple reason that the standard of right and wrong is ever rising—the few best amongst us considering as sinful certain acts which are tolerated and not even censured by the many, and the later ages always becoming more particular and more self-restrained than the ages preceding them.

The actions of men, if they can be considered apart from their moral aspect, are the well or ill regulated results of natural impulse, and in nearly all, if not all, cases of sin, they are the results of excessive, or defective, or untimely exercise of natural functions which are in themselves not only not evil, but absolutely necessary to life and goodness. Actions, then, only receive a moral quality from something altogether beside them, and that something is the conscience in man—a sense of right and wrong—a feeling in each one that for him such and such an act or motive is sinful. The actions of men, I repeat, are not in themselves morally evil. The power to lie, to steal, to commit adultery and murder, is not an evil power, but a good power—a good gift from God. It

is the same power as that by which we save life, live in lawful love, do wrong to no man, and speak the truth. So far as God has made man, the faculties which man has are good and not evil, and the exercise of those faculties in any way which a man pleases is not in itself sin or absolute evil. Men do sin in the exercise of those faculties without a doubt, but God no more makes the sin than he makes darkness. What God makes is *light*, and light shines where He chooses it to shine. There is no such thing as *darkness*. It is not a thing at all. *Light is something*. Where light is not we call the darkness—just as where nothing is we say there is emptiness. God does not create emptiness. It is absurd to say that that which is nothing can be made. So God did not create *darkness*, for darkness is only a word, and nothing more—a word by which we express the absence of light.

In a moral sense, then, God has not created *evil*, for there is no such thing as evil. Sin, or evil, is only a word by which we express the absence of good. God sends a sense of right into man's heart just as He sends light into certain parts of the universe; and that sense of right creates a difference or contrast where none was manifest before. Wherever that sense of right falls, it makes a moral contrast between one action and another which was not thought of before, and which did not even exist. God's law or conscience in man thus, and thus only, gives a moral character to our actions. So I deny that there is sin anywhere except as it is felt, and I

deny that God has created evil, for evil does not really exist any more than the darkness. If we must reproach God at all, let us reproach him for disturbing our animal repose by giving us a conscience. But no moral being would ever do this. Or let us reproach him that conscience has not entirely illumined the moral universe—that the light has not been universal and constant. But this only fools would do, who want to see things made perfect all at once without progress, or timid and restless children, who wish that it could be always day and never night. But there ought to be an end for ever of reproaching God for the evil of the world, because no real evil exists, and what was once thought good or indifferent has become condemned by *ourselves* through the addition of God's light of conscience.

If any man sin, it is not because God has made him bad, or weak, or sinful to begin with, but because God has begun to raise him from a sleep, or death, or moral unconsciousness, into a nobler life. There is no man so low in the scale of humanity as the man, if such can be found, who is not conscious of ever having done wrong, or of ever having had a sinful thought. To know that certain acts would be in him sinful is to have a higher and grander nature than that of the beasts around him. It is to have part, at least, of the inner world lighted up with the Fire of God, the Sun of Righteousness; which, the brighter it flames, casts the deeper its shadows, and brings out all the delicate shades of colour and outlines of form and

distance which would be lost in a twilight, and not even imagined in the darkness. We are wicked, then, not because the state of man is by nature wicked, but because the law of progress, to such beings as we are, demands moral sentences on the past and the present, in order that the future may be better still. We are wicked only as we know ourselves to be ; we are wicked only as the light of conscience has shone clearly and constantly on the actions and motives of our lives.

I find so much more to say on this subject that I must defer its conclusion for another Sunday. Meanwhile, let me gather up for you what I have been trying to show. It is this, God is not the author of evil, for there is no absolute evil in the world at all. All that we call evil is negative and relative. To quote the truthful lines of the poet :—

“ All nature is but art, unknown to thee ;
 All chance, direction which thou can'st not see ;
 All discord, harmony not understood ;
 All partial evil, universal good.”

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 2ND JUNE, 1867.

“ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

ISAIAH lv. 8, 9.

Once more, my friends, I ask your attention to these words in connection with the presence of what we call sin or moral evil in the world.

You will remember that I endeavoured, last Sunday, to show that there is no absolute evil in the world at all. That sin is only in the feelings of man, and is not a something outside of us created by God. That God has sent the light of conscience, which reveals and creates a distinction between certain acts, and motives, and desires which was not seen before,

and which did not even exist until the light of conscience began to shine. I have now to show that this Divine plan, though it occasions great pain and toil to the soul of man, and is a plan which would never have been chosen by men, is one infinitely wiser and better than any which men could have devised for their highest good and happiness.

Trusting to your having understood me so far, I shall now go on to speak of sin in ordinary language—to speak of it as existing not merely in the feelings, but in fact. For all practical purposes, we may say that there are good and evil thoughts and deeds, and that all men are more or less sinners.

The objection against the wisdom and goodness of God in allowing sin may be thus stated :—Why does God allow moral evil in the universe ? Why did He not make men from the first incapable of sin ? These two questions I will now try to answer. The first and most important answer is, that man, constituted as he is, could never have become *good* in the highest and truest sense of the word, unless he had known by experience what evil is. The very essence of real goodness is *freedom*—freedom of choice. The thief in prison no longer steals only because he cannot steal. The reformed thief at liberty no longer steals because he *will not* steal, although tempted to do so. The one in prison cannot prove or test his goodness even if reformed, for he has no freedom.

The other shows his goodness by being free and yet abstaining from theft. Again, a man may lead

what is termed a virtuous life, because, if he does not, he knows he will be ruined or disgraced ; although if there were no chance of ruin or disgrace, he would do all that his conscience condemned. This man is not free. He is only outwardly good, *i.e.* his outward conduct is approved by his fellow-men, because he is forced by circumstances into that line of conduct. His goodness is, therefore, only a pretence. Another man, under different circumstances, is strictly virtuous, although he suffers ruin and disgrace for being so. He might have all he wanted of earthly success and keep the favour of his friends and acquaintance by doing wickedly, by following the wicked and corrupt examples around him. But he prefers ruin and disgrace to doing wrong. He is good from deliberate choice of goodness. He is not bribed into goodness by hope of reward, nor menaced into evil-doing by fear of suffering.

Nothing can be plainer, then, from these instances, than that goodness is only goodness when a man is free to choose between good and evil ; that mere good conduct, made inevitable by circumstances, does not constitute goodness, and that a man is only good when he is good from choice—when he does what is right because it is right, and when he might do wrong. I will not say, God could not have made a race of creatures to have acted always right and never wrong, because it is my deepest and most earnest hope with regard to the future of mankind that God is now engaged in preparing us all for such

a life of goodness. But I think we may say truly, that as God could not do an absurdity or an impossibility, such as to make a body be in two different places at once, so He could not have made man to be good in our own highest sense of the term good, unless there had first been temptation to evil, power and opportunity to do evil, and actual experience of evil.

If, then, evil is essential to the production of goodness, God's ways in allowing evil are indeed higher than our ways, and His thoughts higher than our thoughts. If you grant this, you grant all. God is not merely entirely justified in the actual state of mankind, but the superior wisdom and kindness of His ways are made manifest by the very things which, to a superficial observer, seem to be the greatest obstacles to a belief in God's goodness.

But, besides this inherent necessity for the evil and good in order to make men good at all, there are many strong arguments in favour of God's plan. It is true, for instance, that for every evil there is a corresponding and a conquering good. Not only is all moral energy and courage begotten by this strife with sin in each man's heart, but the presence of evil in others calls into exercise some of the most beautiful and noble of human virtues. Without sin there would be no patience; without injury there would be no forgiveness; without offences there would be no long-suffering; without moral debasement there would be no Divine pity, such as the heart feels when it yearns over the much-loved sinner. The very ties of fatherly

and motherly love would never have been known in their tremendous and eternal strength had it not been for the shamelessness of a wanton daughter and the profligacy of a prodigal son. As a mere training-school for our own characters, the world is infinitely better fitted as it is than it could have been had there been no sin in it.

Sin within and sin without, together make up our earthly discipline, which raises us at every step in our heavenly course.

For consider once more what sin is. Sin is the name which we give to what our consciences condemn. It is a something to be fought against and conquered within—a something to be borne with long-suffering, kindness and love when it wounds us from without—to be conquered, indeed, only by forgiveness and gentleness, and meekness and charity; not to overcome, but to be itself overcome with good. By its very nature, then, it is man's enemy; for the moment it is felt, we feel that we ought to resist and overcome it. God has not brought it to us to make our lives difficult and sad; but he has brought the light which reveals what we have to work against and to conquer. Sin is like a long road over which we must travel—a long road which seems to separate us from our home, but which also surely and truly leads to it. But to lead us there we must conquer it step by step, and not sit down contented with its hard, cold, unsheltered stones, but be up and walk or run over it as best we can, and so use it, while we destroy, yard by yard, its

hostile length. The road is good enough, and we do not destroy the road because of its length. We conquer its distance by exertion, and find that it has been our friend. So man and goodness are separated by the pathway of life, which is full of sin. If we would reach goodness at all we must make that road shorter, moment by moment; not by flying leaps, which would exhaust our strength, or by round-about wanderings, which only lengthen the journey, but by steady onward march, from day to day, and hour to hour, conquering and leaving behind to-day the evil things of yesterday, and to-morrow the evil things of to-day. This is a blessed life if we only knew it, and only knew and remembered why it is that God has placed us here, and why He did not mould us into a mechanical perfection, just as men make vessels of glass and clay, and the wonderful but unconscious machinery which almost lives and speaks.

Whether God could or could not have made man incapable of sin at first, instead of leaving this bliss for the crowning reward of our struggling race, at all events He has not done so, and this is a good presumptive reason that His is not merely the best way, but the only way of making men really good and happy at all. But the question ceases to have any force when we once fairly discern that man cannot become a sinner except by first having holy and good feelings in his heart, which show him what sin is. A man does not fall, but is really raised when he becomes conscious of the difference between good and

evil. He was down low indeed before his conscience was awake; but when it first spoke and made him tremble, he then made his first step towards heaven and goodness. When conscience first spoke and set up its authority over the impulses of his flesh—thus making discord in his life, and disturbing his animal repose—then, indeed, he rose into newness of life, and was numbered no longer with the brute creation, but among the sons of God, whose life is immortal, and whose immortality is bliss.

And what really gives all the force and meaning to these arguments of mine is the belief in God's aim and purpose to bring all men to the *goodness* in which He himself exists—to make them all at last share in His glorious perfection, and to be made like unto His glorious image. If this hope be vain, then, I grant, there is no explanation of our present conflict with sin; no ground for belief in a God at all; no reason for even wishing that there were one. Better to be without a God, quite dark and hopeless, than to believe in one who either would not or could not bring all good to all men out of their present evil; for such a being would add malignity to every yet unsolved riddle of human life—would not merely leave us in a choking darkness, but would burn our tender spirits in a horrid glare of hellish flame. Away with such a maddening thought! The God who made man is one who must love goodness in us, and who would never have made any of us unless He had been sure and certain of the fulfilment of His

own most loving will in every one, to bring them out of all their darkness into His marvellous light. In *this* God—the God whose voice we hear in our conscience, saying, “Cease to do evil, learn to do well,” “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good,”—in Him, I say, is space for highest hope, for widest love. From just the small feeble strugglings of our innermost selves against evil, selfishness, cruelty, we may yet come to learn the infinite height and depth of the goodness and love of Him who made us. In the words of the Prophet, let us carry home God’s message of eternal rest, “I know the thoughts that I think toward you—thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”

THE author of these sermons in Parts VIII. and IX. is painfully aware of their defects. He only desires, by their publication, to awaken thought and further enquiry on this momentous theme. If any reader can correct his errors, or supply a better solution of the difficulties here touched upon, the author will be very grateful for a communication on the subject.

THE
"SLING AND THE STONE."

VOL. III.

PART X.—OCTOBER, 1868.

ST. STEPHEN
AND
THE RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF CONFORMITY.

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 9TH AUGUST, 1868.

*“ And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice,
Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when
he had said this he fell asleep.”*

ACTS vii. 60.

THE narrative of the martyrdom of Stephen which we have read this morning throws much light upon the rise of Christianity. Though we have no martyrdoms now, yet we are still reaping the benefit of those that are past. Even the brief record of the words spoken by him, and of the noble manner in which he met his fate, is enough to kindle our enthusiasm, and to shed lustre upon the religion for which he died.

But on closer examination we find much in this narrative which explains the position occupied by the Early Church in relation to the Jewish Church of

that period. In reading Stephen's address to the Sanhedrim, we see what it was in the new religion of Christ which the Chief Priests hated so much, and so much dreaded.

The doctrines of the new creed were strange enough, and deeply at variance with those of the old creed; but this diversity of doctrine sank into insignificance beside the difference of principle between the old and new religions.

The old creed had settled down into a system of form and ceremonies, by which alone it was supposed that men could offer true service to Jehovah. It had never been questioned in that age whether forms and ceremonies were necessary to worship at all. All that had been contended for was that the Mosaic ritual, as it was called, was the one only ritual divinely revealed, and divinely appointed. The Jew had had his great conflict with Samaritan Dissent, and was content with despising and sneering at the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim, much in the same way as some clergy will sneer at the Dissenting chapel, which the law will not allow them to pull down. Both Jew and Samaritan confessed alike the necessity for outward ceremonies in the worship of God. Neither of them dreamed that true worship could only be in the heart—in spirit and in truth—and that it was independent alike of the temple in Jerusalem and the temple on Mount Gerizim.

The new Prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, had created quite a scandal amongst them—a scandal which

excited the indignation of Jews and Samaritans alike. He had not set up another schism, enjoining a new set of ceremonies in the place of those generally in use; nay, He even attended the temple services and taught in the synagogues, retaining His connection with the Jewish Church almost to His dying hour. He had sided with neither Jew nor Samaritan, but He had condemned both. He aimed a blow, in short, at their whole system of religious belief and religious practice, which they could never forgive, and which they must at once return with a fatal stroke, or it would destroy their religion altogether.

In this speech of Stephen's before the High Priest and Sanhedrim, we have the summing up, as it were, of the charges and counter-charges mutually brought against each other by the Jewish Church and the early Christians.

A certain synagogue, called the Synagogue of the Libertines—some of the Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, chiefly Hellenist Jews—had been some time disputing with Stephen, and they were not able to resist the wisdom and the force with which he spoke. Finding themselves thus defeated in argument, they betake themselves to false accusation, and bring witnesses to swear that they had heard Stephen say blasphemous words against Moses and against God. And they stirred up the people, who were ready enough to cry shame upon him, while the elders and the scribes came upon him and caught him, and brought him before the Court of the Sanhedrin. Here they repeat the false charge, but in other

words—"This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law. For we have heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and change the customs which Moses delivered unto us." This charge was practically true, though the other charge was false.

Partly dishonesty and partly self-deception thus lead violent bigots to bring false charges against a Reformer, or to over-state a true charge. A word spoken against any part of their religious belief or customs is considered as if spoken against God himself. If any one should proclaim the superiority of his own religious assurances over the doctrines and practices in common use, he is at once accused of blasphemy and infidelity.

But there stood Stephen, calm and brave; his very face lighted up like an angel's, with the courage and faith burning in his heart. The High Priest challenges him to reply to his accusers—"Are these things so?" Then Stephen, without condescending to answer them, makes this address, knowing that this would be his last chance of delivering God's message to his benighted countrymen. He offers no word of self-excuse; he does not plead for mercy; he does not attempt to screen himself from their injustice or their fury; but he pours out from the fulness of his heart his own convictions of what God's dealings were with his nation in olden time, what God's highest message was in the mouth of His prophets, and how, all along, the Hebrew people had kept falling and falling away

from the high standing-ground that God had given them, and were for ever misconceiving the true nature of God himself, and therefore were for ever making the profoundest mistakes as to His true service.

The main argument may be summed up thus: —
 “This temple of yours, in which you boast so proudly, is *not* essential to the true worship of Jehovah, nor has it, with all its Mosaic rites and ceremonies, done you any good, nor kept your race from idolatry, nor from persecuting God’s faithful servants. God makes Himself known to the hearts of men outside this temple. Yea, long before its foundation was thought of, He called Abraham, and Joseph, and Moses, and led the people with many wonders and signs of His favour, long, long before this temple was reared, or its elaborate system of worship drawn out. All along the people had been idolatrous and disobedient, and only the few here and there had worshipped the Father in spirit and in truth. The people had hated God’s prophets and despised his message, preferring any day to worship the symbols of bestial indulgence rather than a pure and holy God—any day preferring to offer their sons and their daughters to Baal, or to Moloch, rather than to lay their own hearts on the altar of Jehovah.” (All this while the temple services were developing, very gradually, it is true, and not till the time of Solomon was the first temple built, and its solemn worship inaugurated). Stephen, up to this point, had been reminding his countrymen of their having had God nigh to them

all those centuries *without the temple*, and that in the beginning, as it was now, the people were profoundly ignorant of the spiritual nature of God, and therefore uninfluenced by the warnings and entreaties of God's true prophets. Now, he hurls forth those words of accusation, which would, no doubt, of themselves have sealed his death, and which seemed really blasphemous in the ears of the assembled Jews:—"Howbeit, the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands, as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and Earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord, and what is the place of my rest?"

Of course, this was blasphemous, even though fortified by quotation from the scroll of their own sacred Bible. Did not that book expressly declare that the Most High *did* dwell in the temple made with hands, and was worshipped with men's hands? Did not the Psalmist write, "Arise, O Lord, into thy resting place, Thou, and the ark of Thy strength?" And did not another and another sing, "Praise the Lord who dwelleth in Sion;" "Praised be the Lord who dwelleth at Jerusalem;" "The Lord hath chosen Sion to be an habitation for himself, He hath longed for her: this shall be my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have a delight therein?" And yet Stephen dares to say, "Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands." The Sanhedrim could ill brook such an outrageous departure from established belief as was implied in

these words of Stephen. But, before they had time to vent their horror, he attacks the august assembly before him, driving home to their affrighted hearts the charge of having murdered the blessed Jesus:—

“Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers.” Burning words of righteous indignation well and timely spoken! “Now or never” must have been the brave thought of that solitary and deserted champion of the new faith. What he had to say was the truth, and he would tell it them, even if it cost him his life. They had boasted long enough of Moses and the law and their temple. He would remind them that all these together had only made them stiff-necked, and persecuting, and murderous. They had cared so much for these till they had ceased to care for God. They had loved their temple worship till they had forgotten justice, mercy, and the love of God. They had caressed and followed blindfold their own priests, till they had learnt to hate and to stone God’s true prophets. The truth then went straight home, and cut to their hearts (more literally, their hearts were sawn asunder); but the spasm of pain and self-reproach was instantly succeeded by one of rage and hatred—“They gnashed upon him with their teeth.”

But this glorious man, undaunted, looking steadfastly up to heaven, saw, as well he might see in such a moment of ecstatic courage, the glory of God, and Jesus standing there at God's right hand. This, of course, must not be understood literally, but it expresses in most poetical and beautiful language the assurance with which Stephen was filled at the moment of his greatest peril. His first great light was the splendour of God—the invisible, yet everywhere present, life and light of men. His second comfort was drawn from the remembrance of Jesus, the first martyr of the Christian Church, who was now in peace and glory at God's right hand.

Following in the steps of the Son of man, he bent his head to the Divine will, which was then and there over-ruling for sublime good the cruel passions of wicked men. His witness had been given. He had pierced the hearts of the Sanhedrim. He had proclaimed the universality of the Divine presence, and the uselessness of the temple worship. His thoughts turn now to the crowning glory for which his fidelity and courage had fitted him. He commends his soul to his master, whose bleeding feet had left tracks to mark the pathway to eternal rest. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then, all anger hushed, his heart in perfect peace, he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. This is God's highest reward for those who are exposing themselves to the fury of fellow-men for the sake

of truth. He simply makes them full of generous forgiveness. He does not promise them any escape from ill-usage, nor any glory in the life to come for martyrdom on earth. But now, on this very earth, which is being stained by their blood, or chilled by their cry of pain, their hearts open to receive the fullest measure of Divine love and compassion of which human nature is capable; and so God blesses them with a whole heaven of peace and happiness in teaching them to pray for their murderers. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

Can any reward be equal to this? Can any crown of glory be so great a prize for self-sacrifice as this complete transfiguration of our own hearts? Well might it be said of Jesus and his sainted followers, "They were made perfect through their sufferings."

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 23RD AUGUST, 1868.

“ In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon ; when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing ; and he said unto him, ‘ Go in peace.’ ”

2 KINGS v. 18, 19.

CONSIDERABLE agitation is now prevailing on the question of the morality or immorality of clergymen retaining their offices and benefices after they have ceased to believe some of the doctrines contained in the creeds and articles of our Church. Nor is this agitation confined to the members of the Church of England, but it is shared alike by other religious bodies, such as the Wesleyans, Independents, Presbyterians, Baptists, Unitarians, and the Society of Friends.

The times in which we live are exceptional and rare. Theological opinion is everywhere being sifted, examined, and changed. We are passing through a state of transition from comparative mental repose into one of great activity and excitement, and those in whom this mental disturbance is already far ad-

vanced, and has borne fruit in a new declaration of theological views, are the objects of much hostile and friendly criticism, some maintaining that the teachers of the new school should remain where they are, and endeavour to reform the whole Church from within, others insisting that it is morally wrong to continue to hold office in a Church in some of whose doctrines the clergyman has ceased to believe. His functions as a minister require him to repeat in public worship some statements which he virtually or openly denies, and this is affirmed to be not merely a disadvantage, but an immoral act.

Now I think that these thoughts, which are burning in the hearts of many good members of our State and Church, ought to be patiently and reverently considered. The charge of being immoral in the very highest functions of our sacred office is in itself most grave and deplorable, and no one with a conscience could bear to sit down contentedly under such a charge without deep and solemn self-scrutiny, and a determination to do what is right at all costs to his own feelings and comfort. And you, my friends, must not think that this is a question which only concerns me as your minister, and which you may leave to be argued out in the newspapers and pamphlets of the day. It concerns you quite as much as it does me. The charge of immorality in uttering disbelieved statements, if justly made at all, must be made against yourselves as well as against me. Every layman in the Church who has given up, *e.g.*, a belief in a personal devil, and who still goes to church, is open to the same charge of saying things

which he does not believe, and of sanctioning by his presence, and it may be by silent acquiescence, the very statements which his heart disapproves. I am only one of you in this respect; I am your mouth-piece, the reader of your prayers, confessions, thanksgivings; the one appointed by law to speak for the rest—not to speak for myself only, but for the entire congregation, who undoubtedly consent to what I read in their names in the services of the Common Prayer Book.

This matter is therefore one of common interest for us all; and I think you will admit that, if it is wrong for me to read any part of the service with which I do not heartily agree, it is no less wrong for you to join in the service as it stands, taking no exception, making no protest, but conforming outwardly to it all, as men and women used to do long before a doubt was thought of, or a denial even whispered.

Now, admitting for a moment that we are doing wrong in this, there is one manifest duty incumbent on us all, and this is to do nothing in haste. We have seen the deplorable mischief of secessions from the Church, and of divisions and splits among other religious bodies. The evils of such rending of the ties of membership are patent and manifold, and can only be justified in extreme cases, and then not till every other remedy for contention has been tried in vain. At least then we must take time to consider the question with the care and attention it deserves, and we must give time also to the Church at large, and to those who have the power of raising in its proper place—*i.e.*, in Parliament—the question of Reforma-

tion. In so grave a matter, even were we in the wrong, the first duty is caution and deliberation. Anything done in haste would be sure to be wrong. Any premature withdrawal or sudden expulsion would prove afterwards to have been the worst possible policy for the Church of England, and for the cause of truth which we have at heart.

Besides this, the nation is only just awaking to the momentous question involved in the change of theological opinion to which I have referred. It is true that for twenty years and more these subjects have been privately discussed, and some of us, like myself, entered the ministry of the Church holding views very nearly the same as those we now hold, and yet we entered it with the knowledge and sanction of the archbishops and bishops who ordained us. Still, it is only within ten years that any open attacks upon traditional views have been made in this country, and it is only five years since public attention was fairly roused to the subject. The country at large is not ripe for action in this matter. Surprising as has been the spread of our new views, still more surprising as was the sympathy we found already existing in every part of England, and ready to welcome the new opinions, yet there is an immense amount of work to be done before the nation can fairly decide what it does believe and what it rejects; what shall be the future standards of doctrine, or even whether there shall be any standards at all. The leaven is working well and rapidly, but the mass to be leavened is enormous, and the process of fermentation has not long

been begun. Therefore, I say, whatever else we do, let us not act with precipitate haste—let us wait quietly, even while we work diligently, and watch the tide of events.

Moreover, while this wonderful work is in process, a far more radical divergence from accustomed views has been made by another section of clergy and laymen. In spite of revised formularies of worship—in spite of the Thirty-nine Articles, nearly all of which are openly and plainly anti-Catholic—in spite of custom three centuries old, the Ritualists and Sacerdotalists of our own English Church have come forward to avow their deep and entire sympathy with the doctrines of Rome. Many of this party have already left our Church, and have openly joined that Church which the others whom they have left behind still regard as the Holy Catholic and true Church; the only difference being this, that the Catholics still remaining with us look upon our Church as a branch of the old one, and affirm openly that there is no radical difference between the Church of England and that of Rome.

Not to go into other instances of divergence from customary forms of thought, this surely is a far more open and avowed renunciation of the English Church doctrines and principles than any new views which we have taught and accepted. There are some writers, no doubt, who say that the Anglo-Catholics are as morally wrong as they consider us to be; but in general the impression is that the Catholics have more right in the Church of England than we have. Of course we have our opinion on this point, and we have a right to demand, that if we withdraw from the

Church of England, they should do so too. We at least are loyal to the Union of Church and State; they openly aspire to a perfect freedom from State control, and the re-establishment of ecclesiastical authority by itself. We approve of, and are at all times willing to bring our teaching to, the Courts of Law which exist for the very purpose of testing its legality; they, on the other hand, denounce, in no measured terms, the very constitution of these Courts, and band together by thousands to express a flat contradiction and rejection of the decisions which have been made by our highest legal tribunal. We at least would maintain the right of private judgment for all members of the Church alike; they would forbid the exercise of private judgment as a sin at once hateful to God and to the priests. We never made an attempt to alter the forms of public worship, or to force upon our congregations a symbolism which they disliked; they, however—often with the consent of their congregations, but not always—have made a succession of innovations which have, in some churches, reduced the outward aspect of our simple worship to that of Rome, against whom we have for three centuries made our solemn protest.

I say, then, it is not fair to single out those who think as we do, and to ask us to secede from the Church. If we are at all at variance with the Formularies and Articles as they stand, at all events we will not take the law into our own hands, or interfere to disturb the harmony of public worship by any self-willed and head-strong aberrations from the appointed order. Reformation must come; let it come at the

right time and in the right way. Further, as our Church is at present constituted, any one may bring a charge of heresy against a clergyman in the Ecclesiastical Courts, to be followed, as the case might be, by an appeal to the Committee of Privy Council. In England no man is, in the eyes of the law, considered guilty of breaking the law, until the case has been tried and due sentence pronounced. So no clergymen or laymen ought to be accused of holding or teaching illegal doctrine unless the accuser is at the same time bringing the charge into the proper court, and, at least, testing the accused in the only legal way. If then, a clergyman is not even proceeded against for what he teaches, and is thereby tacitly acknowledged not to be breaking the Church's law, it would be in the highest degree unfair to expect him to criminate himself and to show by his resignation that he had no right to minister any more in the Church. So long as he feels that he has a right, and so long as no adverse legal decision has deprived him of that right, he is, in my opinion, perfectly justified in remaining at his post. If one such case were settled by the law, it would, of course, be both natural and right for all who sympathised with the condemned opinions to retire from their benefices and other offices without the necessity for repeated trials in every case.

We may well ask to-day, where and when have our opinions been condemned by any English Court of Justice. The Bishop of Natal has in vain begged and implored his brothers on the English Bench to prosecute him; he has even offered £100 towards a

fund for prosecuting him if they will only bring his teaching to a legal test, instead of abusing and denouncing him. But his denouncers are afraid to do this, *i.e.*, they know that the Bishop of Natal has said nothing contrary to law, and so they dare not risk the great expense of prosecution, and the still greater evil of having a decision from the highest Court in our land in Bishop Colenso's favour. So far we are justified, I think, in holding our office from a legal point of view, even if we were not morally right in doing so, supposing there were no law to appeal to.

I must, at the risk of wearying you, now go a little further into the question of the moral right, in which, as I said at first, yourselves are as much involved as I am. First and foremost, then, this is a matter of *conscience*. It will not do to dictate one to another what we ought to do. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. In St. Paul's day some converts gave up eating anything offered in sacrifice to idols, others still continued to eat such things, and St. Paul himself declared that those who ate under such circumstances did so and gave God thanks; while those who did not eat, still gave God thanks. "Meat," he said, "commendeth us not to God, for neither if we eat are we the better, neither if we eat not are we the worse." Charity and brotherly kindness must direct us, and in all things we should endeavour to approve ourselves not to man but to God. "Why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience?" Those who secede, secede, as we believe, from conscientious motives; those who stay at their

posts ought to be credited with the same integrity. At all events, let us make the dictates of conscience in this as in all matters the first and last guides of our conduct.

If conscience be with us in our resolution to stay, that is enough; but we can also justify ourselves to men, if they ask for it, by reminding them that if there are certain parts of our worship distasteful, there are other parts in which we heartily and entirely agree. That no service anywhere, now existing, could furnish us with more of what we enjoy and believe to be true than we find in our own Church at this day. That while we thus join in its nobler part, heart and soul, without scruple or reserve, we find that that part is, in reality, its principal and fundamental part. Almost every prayer begins with it, and the very creeds have it as their first utterance—the foundation-stone of all true religion and worship. We know that if what we love and admire in the Church Service were to be obliterated, the Prayer Book would have to be even more altered and defaced than it could possibly be altered by any ultra-Catholic to suit himself. Take away what we can most heartily join in, and the greater part, as well as the most important part, of the Service would be expunged. For the sake of this, then, we may well bear for a time with the blemishes, weaknesses, and minor superstitions, which the Church of Rome bequeathed to us when we parted company at the last reformation. We need not hesitate at the repetition of any creed which makes us say, as its first words, “I believe in One God, the Father

Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible." Any clause added thereto, which seems to weaken or to disguise that first grand utterance, may well be tolerated, considering the changing times in which we live, for the sake of the cardinal and central and most vital principle upon which all the rest is, or is supposed to be, based.

If we find ourselves rebelling against certain doctrines written or implied, we do well to bear with them for the sake of our brethren, to whom those doctrines may still be dear. For my part, if Jew or Catholic, Turk or Hindoo, will unite with me in praying the Lord's prayer, or in offering those beautiful petitions in the Litany for the common good of all mankind, I would worship in each one's temple, and bear, for the sake of our common aspirations after what is best and holiest, with all those foibles and weaknesses which in my inmost heart I reject as superstition. The time may come, and no doubt will come sooner than any of us expect, when the change in men's hearts and minds will enable us, without wounding any susceptibilities, to leave out from our common worship those parts in which we do not all heartily agree. Until that time come, the least we can do is to bear with each other, and even repeat for our brethren's sake words which, though they have lost all religious meaning for us, still have life and comfort in them for them.

There is something nobler in Naaman's spirit of generous conformity with the outward worship of even an idol like Rimmon for the sake of his royal master and his duty, coupled as it was with a tender conscien-

tiousness, than in the narrow sectarian feeling which cannot understand the elevation of heart toward God to heights where spoken words cannot follow.

If a service were re-cast to-morrow, in which not a word of fault could be found by any one of us, at the end of a year somebody would become dissatisfied, or find that parts of the service had lost their vitality and meaning for him, and that if he continued to join in that service, it must be on the tacit understanding that he agreed with more than he differed from, and that he consented to waive his own private feelings for the benefit and comfort of others. The human mind, be assured, will ever advance, most of all in matters relating to faith and worship; every now and then in our history we may be able to adjust the balance or to bring the public and outward expressions of worship more into accordance with advanced religious convictions. But we must expect times of trial, restlessness, and discord on the eve of all such re-adjustments, and the period of transition must ever be one of more or less painful agitation, like the pangs of nature which usher in a new-born life. God's prophets, if they are wise, will encourage and not discourage the patience and deliberate care of those who refuse to act upon hasty impulse or from a timid sensitiveness to popular clamour. They will, at least, counsel caution and great forethought. While the balance of motives and resolutions is yet quivering, they will extol the authority of conscience as supreme, and when its verdict has once been given and obeyed, they will say, in God's name, "Go in peace."

THE
"SLING AND THE STONE."

VOL. III.

PART XI.—NOVEMBER, 1868.

THE PHILIPPIN GAOLER
AND
CHRIST OUR EXAMPLE.

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 19TH APRIL, 1868.

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

ACTS xvi. 31.

THERE is scarcely any phrase in common use amongst Christians which is capable of so many various interpretations as the expression, “Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Scarcely any two sections or parties in the whole of Christendom attach the same meaning to the words. Nor can we wonder at this when we find, even in the New Testament itself, examples of different interpretations given to it during the first two centuries.

As instances of this variation of meaning we need only refer to the Second Lesson, and to the Epistle for this morning’s service.

In the former, from which my text is taken, we find an account of the imprisonment of Paul and Silas in the gaol at Philippi—an account which, whether truly historical or not, gives us the particulars of what is called the conversion of the Philippian gaoler. On reading this story carefully we are struck by the want of definiteness, and even by the ambiguity of the terms used. If we cannot divest ourselves of those ideas which we have been accustomed to attach to the words “being saved,” and “believing on the Lord Jesus Christ,” we shall be really quite at a loss to know what these expressions meant in the mouths of the gaoler and the Apostles.

The gaoler is represented as being terribly roused from his midnight sleep by an earthquake, which is said to have opened all the prison doors, and to have absolutely cast loose all the fetters from the prisoners' limbs. How this could happen without killing the prisoners on the spot is not explained. However, admitting the fact, we find the gaoler terribly alarmed, as well he might be, lest his prisoners should have escaped; for the Roman law punished a gaoler with death if a prisoner under his charge were suffered to get free. The poor man, thus frightened almost to death, drew his sword, and was on the point of killing himself, when he was arrested by the voice of Paul, calling to him, “Do thyself no harm, for we are all here.” He then apparently rushed to Paul and Silas, and being able to trust to their honour after this assurance, brought them out,

and falling down before them, said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Now it seems to me impossible to put more than one interpretation upon these words in the mouth of the gaoler, and that one must reasonably tally with the narrative, and be clearly harmonious with the gaoler's state of mind. What was he frightened about? He was afraid of losing his prisoners and of getting into trouble with the Roman magistrates. The doors were not yet refastened. The chains were not yet re-bound upon the feet of the prisoners. He might yet lose one or more in the darkness of the night, and he would have to give an explanation of the occurrence to his superiors; who might not give credence to a single word of his tale. Hence, his whole alarm was for his present and immediate bodily safety; and when he cried out, "What must I do to be saved," he could only have meant, "What must I do to get myself out of this terrible difficulty?" — "How shall I manage to save my life when these circumstances become known to the authorities?" I think this was all he meant, and by no possibility can the words be made to refer to any anxiety for what we call "salvation," or to any fears on account of his soul. If so, we have thus another instance added to many others in the New Testament, when a prayer "to be saved" had exclusive reference to salvation from *earthly* danger and earthly loss. The Apostles in a storm on the Lake of Gennesaret cried out to Jesus, "Lord save us, we perish." Peter said

the same, as he felt himself sinking in the waves on which he foolishly tried to walk.

These and similar petitions "to be saved" were answered, as we read, by Jesus affording the temporal help and relief then wanted. On other occasions of His healing diseases, He bids the applicant "Go in peace, for thy faith hath saved thee." In these instances the prayer was only for temporal deliverance, just as in the case of the gaoler; and we may well understand the answer of the Apostle to have had exclusive reference to the temporal safety of the poor man who had appealed to them in his alarm. It is akin to the cure said to have been wrought by Peter and John upon the lame man at the gate of the temple—and the story is manifestly written to shew that the gaoler escaped the danger which threatened him by "believing on the Lord Jesus Christ." For the words "thou shalt be saved, and thy house," imply that the punishment which the gaoler dreaded should not fall, nor should he be even dismissed from his office, so as to bring ruin on his family.

I do not attempt to go into the question of the truth of the narrative because there are evident marks of its legendary character; but I wish to point out, as forcibly as I can, that the writer of it did not, in this case at all events, associate with the words "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house," any of our modern ideas of "believing" and "being saved;" but that he only endeavoured to

represent the magical results of faith in rescuing men on earth from impending earthly danger.

If we turn now to the Epistle for the day, we find altogether a new set of ideas associated with the words, "believing on Jesus Christ." These ideas are purely spiritual and moral. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God."

The age of miracles was passed, if ever there was one at all, when this Epistle was written, and "believing in" or "believing on Jesus Christ" had an entirely different meaning to what it had in the mind of the writer of the Acts of the Apostles. If I mistake not, the expression "being saved" does not occur once in the Epistle of John. He talks of forgiveness, certainly, but never of salvation. He speaks chiefly of the contrast of light and darkness between those who believe and those who disbelieve; between those who love each other and those who live in hatred. He dwells very much indeed on the phrase "believing on the Son of God," but he invariably connects this belief with the only sure signs of a renewed heart, viz., love to one another, and overcoming the principles and temptations of the world.

I have thus sufficiently, as I believe, illustrated the variety of meanings to be found in the New Testament itself attaching to these common but very important phrases. We cannot certainly tell

what the early Church meant by them, for different views and meanings prevailed; and St. Paul himself, in writing to the Romans, gave a meaning to the words, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ*, altogether peculiar: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised Jesus Christ from the dead, thou shalt be saved;" where salvation is spoken of as a future deliverance, and as conditional on the hearty and honest conviction that God has already raised Jesus Christ from the dead. How different this gospel is to others which have been preached, I scarcely need point out.

I would now briefly consider what we should understand by the word "salvation," and what may properly be meant when we say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Of course, this will be only one more private opinion added to the thousands already in vogue, and which every one is at liberty to accept or reject as he pleases.

"Being saved," is, as I hardly need repeat here, in my opinion, *being improved*, growing better from day to day—strengthening our resistance of sin, and our determination to do what is right. Being bent on doing the will of God instead of following our own lower inclinations; cultivating a kind, generous, and forgiving spirit towards all men, and keeping under restraint the passions of lust, pride, anger, hatred and revenge. In short, to be saved is to be

wishing and striving to cease to do evil, and learning to do well.

I intend to speak more fully on this subject to-night. At present this is enough, and I hope sufficiently clear, to enable us to go on to the next enquiry, "How does believing on the Lord Jesus Christ lead to our salvation?"

The answer to this depends on what we mean by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

I find that many sorts of believing on Jesus do not save people one bit. I find that believing Jesus to be God Almighty; believing Him to be a sacrifice for our sins; believing Him to have risen from the dead, and to have sat down in His human body at the right hand of God; believing that He will come again to judge the world; all these beliefs about Him may be held without making the smallest difference to the lives of people who thus believe. Indeed, I find that some of these believers are rather worse for their creed, more censorious, more self-righteous and conceited, and sometimes more selfish and unkind, than others who disbelieve altogether.

But I think that if people believe that Jesus Christ lived so good a life on earth as to be the pattern and example of what good men should be, and at the same time really admire it and feel that they will not rest satisfied until they are quite as good themselves, their belief in Jesus Christ is likely to save—that is, to improve them. If in reading some of his beautiful precepts, they see how

immeasurably superior the principle of them is to the common principles of the world and of the Church, then I think they will make some effort to adopt His principles for themselves, and to form their lives accordingly. To believe that Jesus—living indeed a higher life than that described to us in the gospels—lived thus that He might do God's will and make men the better and happier for His services, is, I think, a great help to our own progress, to our own enthusiasm in doing and being good. And when we read how He steered equally clear of the bribes and the threatenings of the angry and worldly people among whom He lived, so as at last to be a martyr to His own boldness and integrity; then, I think, we get an idea of heroism, which stimulates us to a life something higher than what commends itself to public opinion, and to exertions in a righteous cause somewhat beyond the reproaches and rewards of the world around us.

People may be very ready to accuse others of not believing on Jesus, but whether their accusations are true or false, I do know that they are utterly incompetent to pass any such judgment while the real nobility and greatness of Christ is as yet not even understood by them. Were He to come now, He would certainly find much calling of Him, "Lord, Lord;" but very little "of the doing of the will of His Father in heaven." "When the Son of Man cometh," He once asked, "shall he find faith on the earth?" No, not faith, but superstition.

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 26TH APRIL, 1868.

“For ye were as sheep going astray: but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”

1 PETER ii. 25.

LAST Sunday our attention was directed to the use of the terms “believing on Jesus Christ,” and “being saved.” It was my endeavour to lead you to understand by the term salvation, progress in all that is good—being improved from day to day. And I endeavoured to show that a faith in the goodness of Jesus Christ as our example is a great help towards this salvation, or our own moral progress.

The Epistle for the day, which furnishes my text, gives me the opportunity of following up the

thoughts of last Sunday by a further consideration of the value of Jesus Christ as our example. The Collect for the day, indeed, speaks of Christ not only as our example but as a sacrifice for our sin, which is justified by the words of St. Peter, preceding my text.

I must own, however, that while I thoroughly and heartily embrace the truth that Christ is our example, I cannot so readily embrace what is often understood by the statement that he is a sacrifice for sin. In one sense, Christ was indeed a sacrifice. His life was sacrificed to the bigotry and blind malice of the chief priests in Judea. He was a sacrifice, too, in the sense of laying Himself open to persecution by an honest discharge of His duty, and in not trying to escape trouble by a violation of principle.

Sin, too, caused his death, as it was sinful to bear malice towards one so innocent and good, and still more sinful to put him to death for the claim which he made for himself, and for us all—that God was his Father and our Father, and that we are His sons. But in what sense the death of Jesus Christ was a substitute for the punishment of your sins or of mine, I cannot discover. Theologians may be right, but until I can see reasonable ground for their opinion, I must keep my own. I can surely see and thankfully confess that his death has done me good, that his sacrifice has been most beneficial to the world in teaching and encouraging true heroism,

true manliness, and true obedience to God's will. Had he not been martyred for the truths which he taught, those truths would probably have been far longer in making their way among men; and England, at this hour, might still have been in pagan darkness. But, then, I know this is not the common meaning of the words "Christ suffered for us," and I do not wish to pretend to put that meaning on them while I am using them in a totally different sense.

I therefore thankfully accept the benefits of Christ's life and death as an example, and as a source of encouragement, to guide oneself in the right path, and to draw, from the contemplation of Jesus, inspiration for noble aims and noble deeds.

Indeed, it is very true, but not often remembered, that the mere acceptance of the popular ideas about the sacrifice of Christ for our sins is not of the smallest value without improvement in our lives. I wonder what St. Peter would think of the Gospel sermons of modern times, could he hear some of our leading preachers. The Epistle from which the text is taken (and which, by the way, is the only one in the New Testament really written by him, the so-called Second Epistle of Peter being of a later origin), is remarkable for its strongly practical character. It breathes throughout a deep affection for Jesus Christ, and a grateful recognition of the blessings received through Him. But from beginning to end it is full of practical religion—pure morality,

in fact—and teaches us plainly enough that St. Peter's idea of salvation was not being saved from punishment, but being turned from an evil course to a good one. I really cannot illustrate this without reading the Epistle through, therefore I would ask you to do so for yourselves at home, just to verify my words. It is true that St. Peter considers the death of Jesus to be a sacrifice for sin; but at the same time he insists, from first to last, on the moral change wrought in the believer as the sum and substance of true faith, true conversion; and this he speaks of as *salvation*.

Sermons actually modelled on the type of this Epistle would not only not be appreciated in many congregations, but would be actually condemned as deficient in Gospel truth, or as making too much of good works. Do read it at home, and see if St. Peter does not dwell on the fact that Christ is more our example than our sacrifice.

There is another remarkable man whose name will have nearly as much weight as St. Peter's in the opinion of some of my parishioners, and it will, perhaps; astonish them to hear such sentiments as I am about to read out of the lips of the great John Wesley. He says—"I find more profit in sermons on good tempers or good works than in what are vulgarly called Gospel sermons. That term has now [he is writing in 1778] become a mere cant word. I wish none of our societies would use it. It has no determinate meaning. Let but a pert, self-sufficient animal, that has neither sense nor grace, bawl out

something about Christ, or His blood, or justification by faith, and his hearers cry out ‘What a fine Gospel sermon!’ Surely the Methodists have not so learned Christ!”

My friends, I hope I have a little of the Wesley spirit beating in my heart, as I have the Wesley blood flowing in my veins. And I wish that his bold and sensible words could be read by everyone calling himself a Wesleyan Methodist.

To return to the text. St. Peter addresses the early disciples of Jesus as sheep who had gone astray, but now that *their lives are altered*; now that they have purified their own souls by unfeigned love of the brethren; now that they have given up fashioning themselves according to their former lusts in their ignorance; now that they are endeavouring to be holy in all manner of behaviour; now that they have learned by well doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, and to endure grief, suffering wrongfully for conscience sake; he says that they are “returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls.”

The unconverted state was described as one of wanton wandering and ignorance, like sheep going astray for want of a shepherd. Now, their turning to righteousness was like having found one who could both guide and restrain them—guide them by His example and restrain them by His precepts; and it was like sheep returning to their shepherd. Doing good and being good was thus the true following of Jesus.

I am sure that the Jesus known to Peter must have been in some respects infinitely more noble than the Jesus described in the Gospels. Of course no immorality is anywhere ascribed to Him, no lowness nor coarseness of nature; but in the Gospels we have the picture of one who, on many occasions, used his tongue in the very way which St. Peter and St. James both condemn. St. Peter describes our Lord as one who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not. In SS. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we find reports of some sayings of Jesus full of revilings—revilings so hard and cruel that Christians could not follow the example of using such language without forfeiting their Christian character. In St. John, Jesus is represented as wrangling in a very undignified manner with His opponents, and actually calling them the children of the Devil. Now I prefer to accept St. Peter's account of our Lord, but if I do so, I must give up the others. Both accounts cannot be equally true.

Hence we discover the true basis or foundation of all morality, and, therefore, of all true religion, to be in a man's own heart; it is not outside of him, in any book, or in any Church, no, nor even in the noblest examples which the world ever saw. These cannot *originate* virtue; these cannot tell us what goodness is. The perception of goodness is instinctive in man, and having first got that from heaven, he can run his eye over

the throng of men around him, or over the pages of the world's biographies, and pick out here and there those whom he calls good—whose conduct excites his admiration—whose example he deems worthy of imitation. It is this faculty in us which determines our choice in the selection both of examples and of precepts. The Jesus represented by one writer we prefer to the Jesus represented by another. The sayings recorded by one historian we prefer to the sayings recorded by another.

We cannot help doing this, and while it gives us the key to the source of all moral progress, it also marks that progress so that we can test ourselves by what we like or dislike. If, *e.g.*, my temper towards some chief priests in my own age makes me read with delight those revilings of the chief priests by Jesus, and feel glad at the abuse poured upon them, it reveals to me the fact that I am stirred by revengeful, or, at least, very angry feeling—that I am in a state of hatred. But if I prefer to think of Jesus as one who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again, when He suffered, He threatened not, I am aware that my temper is improved, and that I prefer the more gentle and patient picture by reason of my own progress. In this way, if we do not actually make our own image of Jesus, we, at all events, change it at will, taking away features that we have ceased to reverence and admire, and adding others which we have learned to consider still more noble than we

have ever worn. Whatever is to us loveliest, purest, gentlest, most loving, most manly, that is to us our Christ; and so long as His name is cherished in the hearts of men, and taken up adoringly on their lips, it will surely stand as a sign or symbol of what God wishes us to be, and His loving life and loving death will be to us the example of what God wishes us to do. In any case we must own that if St. Peter's account of Jesus be the truest, few, if any, of our race have yet reached so high a perfection. He is still the first-born among many brethren, and none can dispute His right to be called the "Shepherd and Bishop of our souls."

THE
"SLING AND THE STONE."

VOL. III.

PART XII.—DECEMBER, 1868.

THE TRUE TOKEN
AND
THE HOSTILITY OF THE CHURCH.

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 14TH JUNE, 1868.

*“Beloved, let us love one another ; for love is of God,
and everyone that loveth is born of God, and
knoweth God.”*

1 JOHN iv. 7.

It is refreshing, after being occupied with controversial subjects and difficult questions of dogma, to turn to such words as these and find rest.

The wonder is that these and similar utterances in the Bible have not entirely engrossed the attention of its readers, and shut out completely all topics of dispute. For simplicity, no words can surpass them. Everyone, old or young, learned or unlearned, of every shade of religious belief, is able to admit how wise and true they are, how universally useful and good. But yet, as a matter of fact, scarcely any

words in the Bible have had less influence in shaping the thoughts and in moulding the conduct of professing Christians. "Let us love one another." "O yes, let us love one another," echoes from every tongue. "For love is of God." "O yes," we cry again, "love is the divinest thing about us. It is God that teaches us to love. It is Jesus who taught us to love our neighbour as ourselves." But there we stop, and having admitted as a matter of course the desirableness of all men loving one another, and the truth that God is the source of all love in men, we turn our ardent attention to subjects of a totally different character—we pray for blessings of quite a different order—we take the deepest interest in those matters which are calculated to destroy love and to breed hatred—and we are so little concerned to cherish brotherly love that we seem able and willing to do without it altogether. And if anyone should go on with the text, and say, "Everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God," many will readily and entirely contradict it, and those who are afraid or ashamed to deny it openly, will insist on a statement of their own which is quite at variance with it. Such persons will say that being very religious, being fond of religious books and prayer-meetings, being able to pray fervently and to preach earnestly, are all far better signs of being born of God. If a man can only give an account of his experiences, and say when and where he was smitten with dread of hell, and felt that his sins were forgiven him for Jesus' sake, he will be

pretty sure of being considered by his minister and friends to be born again, to be born of God. Whereas a man of no outward religious profession at all, who has no such experiences to tell, but who lives a kind and loving life, showing love by his actions to his family, friends, and neighbours, has no chance at all of being considered to be born of God.

And as for love being a sign of *knowing* God, it is never so considered among ordinary Christians. Their signs of knowing God are, believing in the Trinity, believing in the Incarnation, in the Atonement, in the personality of the Holy Ghost, in the personality of the Devil, and in Everlasting Hell. These are the accredited signs of knowing God, and if anyone denies or disbelieves these doctrines, he is pitied for his ignorance of God, and spoken of as a poor misguided man who has fallen into deep and dangerous error. A Unitarian or a Theist, *e.g.*, however loving a life he may lead, is not thought of as one who knoweth God. His love goes for nothing with Christians generally, because he is not orthodox.

We see this in all sections of the Christian Church. It is patent enough to anyone who is familiar with the feelings and habits of Methodists and Dissenters. It is engrafted also into the rules of our own Church with respect to admission to Holy Orders and to Lay Communion. The candidate for ordination is tested not by his known character for selfishness or unselfishness — not according to his living in a state of

love with those around him or not — but he is tested solely by his beliefs and disbeliefs. If he be possessed of the required literary proficiency, and bring a testimonial in favour of his respectability and orthodoxy, he is readily admitted. Not a word of enquiry is ever made to find out whether he knoweth God by the sign of love given us by St. John. Membership with the Church or with any sect in Christendom is invariably made to depend on a man's Creed, and not at all upon his loving life.

I am not wrong, then, I think, when I declare that these words have very little influence on the minds or conduct of professing Christians. If they are asked "How are we to know God?" the answer given is "By learning certain doctrines about Him from the Bible, or from the Church, or from the ministers." Almost anything will do for an answer except this—"By loving one another." This answer is seldom, if ever, given. If they are asked, "Who are born of God?" their answer is, "The converted, those who are in a state of grace, those who have obtained pardon through the blood of Christ, those who are baptized, those who have received the Holy Communion." None will tell you "Those who love one another."

Now the great difficulty to be overcome, before we can alter this state of things and restore Christian belief and practice to St. John's principles, is to get people to see that their creeds and doctrines are

actually standing in the way; that they cannot, as Christian communities, be of real and proper value while they put doctrine and creed before life and love. And this difficulty is increased by the fact that all of them admit the obligation to love one another, and even admire love as the gift of God; and many of them, even of these dogmatists, are most truly loving and generous in their own lives. There is not much to choose between the orthodox and the heterodox on the score of a loving life. There are glorious instances of beautiful lives among every denomination of Christians, among Unitarians, Theists, Quakers, Jews, Sacerdotalists Mahomedans and Pagans. Every creed can furnish instances of similar nobleness of life; and there are good and bad, loving and selfish, in all classes. But it must be observed that I am here speaking of the personal private life of individuals in every sect; and this is quite a different thing to the corporate and collective acts of the sects themselves, who encourage by precept and system a principle the very opposite of that love which shines in the lives of some of their own members.

The religious bodies are all more or less at war with each other, and when not at war with each other, it is only because they are then united against a common enemy. In times of peace they still declaim against each other's ignorance and errors, and speak in terms of pity, akin to contempt, of the distinctive features in each other's creeds. If anyone

amongst them proclaims the principle of my text, and urges upon his hearers that doctrine is of little or no importance; that it does not matter whether a man be a Trinitarian or Unitarian; that it does not matter whether he believes Jesus to be God or only man; that it is of no consequence whether he believes or denies the Atonement; that all this is of no importance as long as he *loves* God and his neighbour truly; then such a preacher, if not hastily expelled from his office, is instantly labelled a Latitudinarian, and by many persons he is called a "blasphemer," an Infidel, and an enemy of Christ. Nor is it only with ill-names that such teaching is generally requited among all sections of Christendom. These ill-names are only expressions of a hatred and hostility seldom satisfied without inflicting practical and permanent injury on the offender. This is where our attack must be made.

We do not assail the lives of men, but the cherished principles of Christian denominations. We take our own humble place as men and women, as no better than other people, not wishing to screen ourselves from the just reproaches we may have earned, nor seeking with any pleasure to show up the shortcomings and inconsistencies of the lives of others. But we may say justly to the Christian Churches, "Your principles are calculated to injure the characters of your several members; to cultivate in them a spirit of pride and self-importance; to make them set themselves up above others, and worst of all to encourage strife and bitterness, and to sow discord

among brethren." We may go on to say, "Your principle of setting doctrine and creed before life and love leads you to treat what you call heresy and what you call vice as of equal abomination in the sight of God—leads you often to be far more severe upon what may be really only an error of judgment, than upon a glaring and oft-repeated sin. Your whole teaching, indeed, about our relation to God is a contradiction of these words in St. John, and leads your members to trace their relation to God to the doctrines they may hold, to the religious sensations they may experience, and to anything in short except that one sign laid down by the writer of the Epistle, when he says, 'Everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.' And the final result of your teaching is to bring men to hate one another, and to deal with the heretic, or the man who differs from you in opinion, as if he were your foe."

My friends, what then shall *we* do who are in some measure to blame for exciting this hostility and raising this bitter opposition. We, too, say, "Let us love one another." But we go and say things that are deeply offensive, deeply irritating, and conducive, as the world is at present, to hatred and strife. Indeed, the worst thing we could say is to repeat and to enforce this very text. Our opponents will forgive almost anything but our saying that their creed is of no consequence—that their doctrines are not worth quarrelling about—that love, and love alone, brings us to a knowledge of God, and proves our being born

of Him. But we cannot help saying this, if we believe it to be true. Ought we to hold our tongues, and let the truth lie buried for the sake of peace? Did St. John follow this plausible but hollow principle? Did St. Paul, and St. Peter, and the rest of the Apostles refrain from speaking out what they knew would only exasperate the religious men of their time? Did Jesus himself never utter a word to wound the religious convictions of his hearers? Did even He keep silence when he knew that his words would bring not peace on the earth, but a sword? And what of all the prophets of old time who taught in sublime language the same truth about love, and took good care to place it side by side in open contrast with the religious opinions prevailing around them? Your own hearts and memories will tell you on whose side the testimony of their lives and examples stands. We must go on. We must open our mouths boldly, heeding neither flattering friend nor threatening foe. But ever, in our course, we must remember the supreme and infinite responsibility of conforming our own lives and tempers as much as possible to the doctrine of love which we preach, not merely as exercised towards those who fiercely oppose us, but in the far more difficult but not less sacred path of our common life towards our families and friends, and all with whom we have to do. Then, surely, we shall, in this our daily duty, begin at length to "understand the lovingkindness of the Lord."

PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

MORNING, 21ST JUNE, 1868.

"Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you."

1 JOHN iii. 13.

AT the time when these words were written, the Christian brotherhood *was* hated by the world at large.

I have already reminded you that the Christian religion had its rise among the more obscure and despised part of the Jewish people, and that for a long time its influence was, with few exceptions, confined to persons of a class already held in low esteem. But this of itself would not account for any open hostility. The stronger feelings of opposition to the new faith were aroused chiefly on theological grounds, and the Christians were hated more than they were despised, because they ventured to denounce the

religious views and ordinances in which they had been brought up, and to embrace and to preach doctrines which were alike destructive of the Jewish and Pagan systems. From St. Paul's, St. Peter's, St. James' and St. John's Epistles, and from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, (however untrustworthy the last-named book may be from an historical point of view), we gather the clearest indication of the position which the early Christians held in the world of their time; and it is needless to do more now than to repeat the well-known fact that the Primitive Church was indeed hated and persecuted during the first three centuries by the world at large.

I have already endeavoured to remind you also of the contrast between *their* position and *ours*—of the general estimation and respect in which Christians are *now* regarded. Not to be a Christian by profession, is to be not even respectable, and there is a sort of tacit understanding by which nearly all Christian Churches and sects recognise what they call the essential doctrines of Christianity, so that any individuals who do not hold these essentials, are regarded with dislike and suspicion by the rest of Christendom, and those few who openly attack the essential doctrines are not merely disliked but hated.

There is also less distinction now between the Church and the world. Nearly the whole of Europe, and a considerable portion, if not the whole, of America, is professedly Christian; and, with the exception of a small minority who retain certain

puritanical distinctions, the habits, manners, customs, morals, amusements, and pursuits of all men in their respective stations of life are pretty much the same. Men of the world, as they are called, show very little outward difference in their conduct to the men who profess religion and go to Church. It is as much the fashion to go to Church as to the races, and men who gamble six days a week, do not forget to go to pray on Sunday. In trade, there is seldom any difference discernible between those who are religious and those who are not. In the professions, there is comparatively none at all. And a person would be thought very eccentric, if the question of religion were brought by him into any of the common dealings of life. If we require a doctor, we employ the most skilful man we know, not the most pious ; if a lawyer, we go to some one recommended or known to us for his knowledge and experience. If we want a house built, we do not enquire first into the religious state of our architects and builders, but generally employ, if we can, those who have the best reputation for a knowledge of their art. If we want food, clothing, the necessaries, and the luxuries of life, we do not mind where these articles are produced, or by whom they are sold, if we can only get the best and cheapest for our money. I think this change in feeling very much for the better, and it is in many respects a great advantage to mankind that the Church and the world have become so mingled as to have nearly lost the outward signs of difference which once distinguished

them. It shows at least that what is good in Christianity has leavened to some extent the rest of the civilized world, and it shows that the mere profession of religion does not go for more than its worth among men of common sense and practical habits. It would never do for a select few to be prying into the religious secrets of other men's lives, and then dealing or not dealing with them according to the extremely imperfect and narrow judgment which might be formed of their religious state. It would be going back to the dark ages to institute an open difference between the world and the Church, or to recognise any distinction between the claims of both.

What is good for the Church is good for the world. What is good for the world is good for the Church. What is good for the clergy is good also for the laity, and what is good for the laity is good also for the clergy. If there be any amusements, any habits, unlawful or even inexpedient for the clergy, they are also equally unlawful or inexpedient for the laity. If professing Christians ought not to do certain things, then the world at large, religious or not, is also bound not to do them. If some duties are binding on Christians, they are equally binding upon all other men. The religious caste ought to be entirely extinguished, not by the conformity of the religious to what is morally wrong; but by the abandonment on every side of what is wrong and irreligious in the world at large. The Christians must give up their pride and religious self-complacency, and learn to be

as large-hearted and generous as the unprofessing world. Christians must care less for their dogmas, and the world must care more for the principles of Christian morality.

What then would become of the hatred between the world and the Christian brotherhood? In such a case, of course, it would never be excited at all; and an alliance once based on the broad foundations of human fellowship and human brotherhood would have little fear of being broken when the sole object of all was the common good.

But although it is admitted that the world and the Church are so mingled now that the distinction between them is nearly lost, how is it that there is still a sense in which the world hates the brethren? The world and professing Christians are now practically one, they no longer hate each other. But we do find that great hatred is shown on the part of the Christian world or the worldly Church towards some few who feel that they form a brotherhood by themselves.

.. The truth is that in several, if not in all, ages of the Christian Church, since its first great alliance with the world under Constantine, there have been isolated individuals who have risen up simultaneously to point out what they believed to be error in the creeds and worship which prevailed around them, and who have thus formed a brotherhood which the rest of the Church or the Christianized world have hated. It always was so, and will be so, while Christianity

endures. It seems to be the principle of the Christian religion to have a growing vitality, a great power of developing itself. I ought rather to say, its influence on men's minds has been, in the long run, to lead them on to wider knowledge and freer liberty, as though in fulfilment of Christ's words "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

The different phases through which the Christian religion has passed are so many that we should more correctly speak of it in the plural number as the *Christian religions*. It was very varied in its earliest expressions, as we can see in reading the New Testament. Having had more than one great thinker and teacher for its author, and being the fruit of many similar trees grown on different soils and in different climates, it naturally multiplied itself in form and character as it spread. Hence the very first great teachers of it gave different views of it; and while all agreed that it was a light from God to help men to be good, the various doctrines which gathered round each teacher's own peculiar form of it kept growing, and changing, and developing, and sometimes decaying, so that heresies multiplied almost as fast as the Churches were founded. Then came a long period in which the Eastern and Western branches of the Church held absolute sway over the countries under their influence, and although the hierarchical governments could by sheer force retain doctrines nearly undisturbed for many centuries, yet even these were powerless to prevent constant minute modifications or private inter-

pretations. These centuries of comparative repose were followed by the Reformation, which arose exactly in the same way as did Christianity itself. A few here, and a few there, first saw and then proclaimed the errors of the authorized and traditional views. They rebelled, and the Church hated them. They were a small and despised brotherhood, but they were quite as strong in God's hands for the work which He set them to do, as were the poor fishermen of Galilee. Their work was not to proclaim a new faith, so much as to denounce old errors; but they did that work well and boldly up to the light they had. They were, however, only the most marked out of a long series of individuals, who have kept up a brotherhood sworn to the cause of truth as opposed to prevailing and established error; and these brethren the world and the Churches—most of all the Churches—have hated. The Churches will hate them, must hate them, inasmuch as they know by instinct that the brethren will be too strong for them, and will in time overthrow what they value most in their creeds. And so we may translate St. John's words into stricter accordance with the facts of our time, and say to the unorthodox, "Marvel not, my brethren, if the Churches hate you." We cannot wonder at it, we must not even complain of it, if we have to endure the common lot of all the men whom God has chosen to be the pioneers in the onward march of Christianity. It is still left to us to win not merely a battle for the truth, but the respect and love of those who oppose us.

We may even yet overcome evil with good, and persuade the bitterest opponents of our new teaching to feel kindly and brotherly regard for our own selves. Of course there is but one way of securing this greater victory, and that is by first conquering ourselves, by subduing our own pride and temper, by willingly and patiently bearing insult, and by following the examples of those brave men who have gone before us, and most of all by setting before us the life and spirit of the Prince of Martyrs; "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered he threatened not, but committed himself to Him who judgeth righteously."

Few are called in any age to this conflict, but it behoves those who are called not to despise those who are not called—not to measure other people's courage by their own—not to think more of their own position in the world's history than of those obscure but priceless treasures of God who live and die not only in the old creed, but also in the fervent love of God and man.

These words of the Apostle have a profound depth, "He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man but God who hath given unto us all His Holy Spirit." If we are among the haters of new teachers and their teaching, let us learn a more godly way with ourselves and with them. If we are among the hated, let us not bear malice in return, nor puff ourselves up with the proud thought that we belong to the brethren. May God bring us all into the right way, and lead us to honour all men, even while we love the brotherhood.



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